TECH EXCHANGE No. 3 – The Internet Made Simple (part 2)

In this part we will take a whirlwind tour of the Internet and its common uses. I have decided to create a third part to this article that will describe the communication and programming technologies of the Internet. We will explore all these topics in more depth in later articles, but this provides a starting point for our discussions. Before we begin some additions to Tech Exchange No. 1. Thank you for all your comments and suggestions I received by email. One reader (John Smith) emailed me to recommend two programs – CCleaner – see figure 1 (http://www.ccleaner.com) and Spyware Terminator – see figure 2 (http://www.spywareterminator.com). Both of these programs can be kept up to date easily via the Internet.
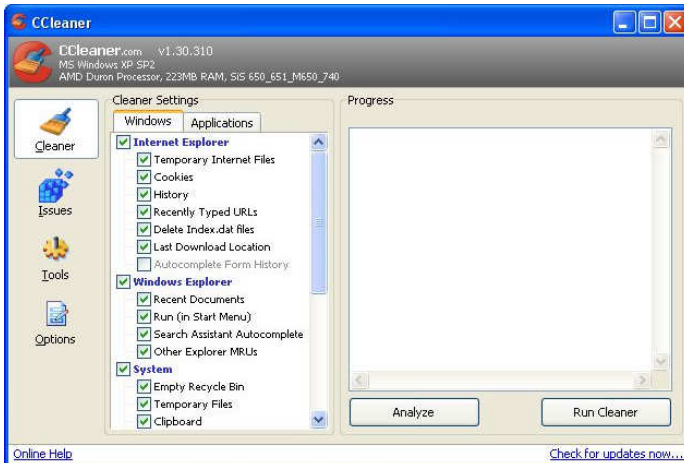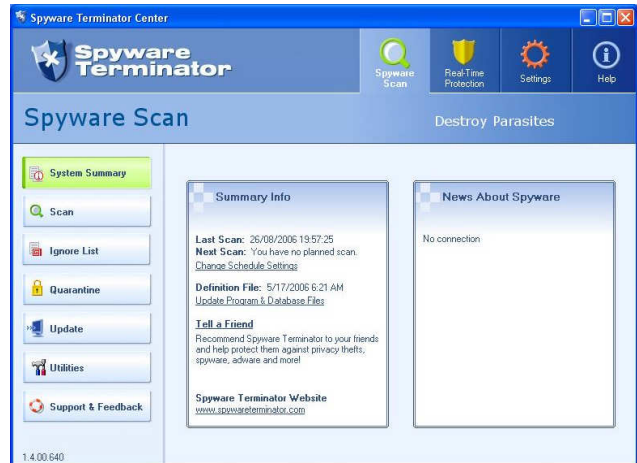

Figure 1

Figure 2

Of course two of the biggest uses of the Internet are searching for information and email. This brings us to the subject of 'Search Engines'. These are websites that you enter keyword(s) and they will supply you with the details of all the websites that match the keywords. For the best results you need to choose your keywords carefully. For example a search using the keyword 'cameras' might say return a list of 34,000 websites, where as using the keywords 'second hand Pentax cameras' might return a list of just 15 websites. Some common search engines are http://www.dogpile.com, http://www.google.com and http://www.yahoo.com. For information on all the different search engines, visit Search Engine Watch (http://www.searchenginewatch.com). For email you can either use a web based service such as http://www.hotmail.com where all your email is kept on the server or a client based email reader such as Microsoft Outlook (the subject of a future article), where all your email is stored on your computer. You can also use the service Mail2Web (http://www.mail2web.com) to view your email from anywhere in the world. Visit TechWeb Encyclopedia (http://www.techweb.com\encyclopedia) for over 20,000 definitions of IT and Internet terms.

You may have read in the media or the computer press about weblogs or blogs. A blog is simply a free-form text journal entries are added to over time. Blogs can be on any subject and length. Or share your digital photos with friends and family members. Flickr (http://www.flickr.com) allows you to post digital photos with comments and share them with the web at large. You can also allow other web users to post their comments. How about chatting with your family and fiends in real-time with Instant Messaging (IM) technology – visit Microsoft Messenger (http://messenger.msn.com). We can't forget to mention it's also a great source for MP3 format music files, of all kinds, to download to your personal players – see http://www.mp3.com as a starting point.

Another use of the Internet is in obtaining software, which can range from the latest drivers for a particular piece of hardware to full software packages. All software and hardware manufactures have web pages where

you can obtain product information, help and software support. On the other side of the coin there is an increasing use of 'shareware' software. This is where you can download a piece of software 'in a try before you buy' format. This usually involves a 30-day trail or 'limited' version of their software, so you can test-drive it before shelling out your hard-earned money. You should be able to find a piece of shareware for anything you want to do with a PC. As a starting point more information can be found at http://www.download.com, http://www.shareware.com or http://www.tucows.com web sites. Freeware is a variation on shareware where the author(s) is happy for you to use their software for free. Of course a word of warning, stick to the main download sites, regularly backup your system and make sure your anti-virus and anti-spyware programs are update. As an added procreation before installing a piece of software, set a 'Restore Point' (Windows XP). This will enable you to revert the system to how it was before the software was installed if you run into problems. One example of quality freeware is Open Office (http://www.openoffice.org). This provides a full set of office functionality – word processor, spreadsheet, database and graphics. It can also read and write data files in the Microsoft Office file format and best of all its FREE.

Some web page designers divide their web page up into rectangular areas called frames. This could for example result in a webpage where the top section is navigation menu, which does not change whatever section, is selected. This sounds great until you select the 'Print...' menu option and only the **active** frame gets printed, which in most cases is the navigation menu that you have just clicked on. To print the contents that you are interested in you need to click on them to make that the **active** frame. A similar problem occurs when you try to add the site to your bookmarks list (also called 'favourites' or 'hotlist' depending on the browser). Later when you select that bookmark, the browser displays the original frames based top-level page. What's going on? You can only bookmark a URL not the way a webpage looks like after several selections. One solution is to use the **right-hand** mouse button to click on the interested frame, which displays a menu from which you can select to bookmark the particular URL of that frame. One further complication to this is when the webpage has the frame borders turned off (not displayed) in which case you might not even realise that frames are being used.

On the topic of printing problems, how often have you printed a webpage to find the right-hand side cut off? One solution is to change to printing in landscape instead of portrait. Some browsers, like Opera, have a shrink to fit page option you can select in the print dialog. One last thing to try is to copy the required portion of the webpage and to paste it into an empty Microsoft Word document.

This week's recommended site is Lockergnome (http://www.lockergnome.com). This is a set of websites covering all aspects of computer issues form the technical to non-technical. That's it for this week, please send any questions or comments to techexechange@endhousesoftware.com.

By Gavin Baker.