



The Gigaphone

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The Shouting Ground Newsletter

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From the Cubicle of the President ...

New faces at Shouting Ground!

Before launching into the usual tidbits and tech tips, I thought it might be a good opportunity to introduce a couple of new faces at Shouting Ground. We are very pleased to have two new employees to help round out our staff. First, Steve Dyson joins us as Technical Support Associate. He comes to us with a great deal of PC experience and will be available to answer questions about your service or any other technical issues. Second, Sharon Manea joins us as our Administrative Assistant and Receptionist. She is much more organized than we are, so we look forward to putting her skills to work. We need it!

In other news, we succeeded in moving our downtown Chicago facility to a new location at The River Center, 111 N. Canal. This is a state of the art colocation facility complete with UPS power, generator, and 24-hour security. Some of you already use our Chicago dialups (analog and ISDN), but with our move we will also be able to offer higher-bandwidth services including DSL and T-1. Call us at 1-877-33-SHOUT for details.

We are also finishing up the addition of our new satellite feed for Usenet news services. This will eliminate many of the earlier problems we had dealing with the sheer volume of news we get each day. This feed is being delivered by the G-3 satellite located at approximately the same longitude as Corpus Christi, TX. Check out:

<http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/realtime/jtrack/3d/JTrack3d.html>
to locate it yourself!

Lastly, we would like to thank everyone who voted for us in the Octopus Best-Of issue. Shouting Ground has the privilege of being voted #1 Internet Service Provider! Thank you!

Bryan Holloway, President



Inherit the Wind The 'Legacy-Free' Computer

Most of the consumer-oriented new computers are advertised as being 'legacy free'. What does that mean to the buyer?

'Legacy-free' computers are cheaper to manufacture because they no longer include ports that were considered standard on computers since the release of the original IBM-PC. Many of the new machines have eliminated serial, parallel, and PS-2 ports

from the computer in favor of USB, the new 'universal serial bus'.

While the RS-232 serial ports are truly a legacy, they are also ubiquitous. Thousands of devices interface to computers through RS-232 serial ports, from modems to laboratory equipment. The RS-232 standard has been established for over 30 years, and is well defined. The parallel printer port is newer, but no less well established. Newer implementations maintain backward compatibility while adding higher speed and better performance in both directions. Until recently, most desktop printers used the parallel port to connect to your computer. The PS-2 interface standard was slower to catch on, but ultimately replaced the older AT-style keyboard interface and serial mouse. Due to standardization and enormous popularity, the PS-2 interface was the most popular way to connect keyboards and mice for years.

Now we have 'legacy-free' computers that replace all of those ports with USB. One substantial difference is that USB is a 'bus', rather than a 'port'. The distinction is that a port is designed to connect one single device, while a bus allows multiple devices to communicate over the same circuit.

USB has some advantages over the legacy ports:

- Buses are typically faster than individual ports.
- Buses may be daisy-chained.
- Diverse equipment may communicate over the same bus.

There are also some drawbacks:

- You will have to replace most, or all, of your old peripherals.
- Buses are shared. While one device is using the bus, others must wait.
- There are several USB 'standards'. It's changing.
- USB equipment doesn't all interoperate well. Some peripherals won't work with a USB hub, which is needed to increase the number of USB ports.
- USB is only supported by some operating systems. It may not work at all if you're not running Windows 98SE, Windows ME, or Windows 2000. This severely limits your choices.

Unfortunately, there is a trend toward making cheaper computer accessories by moving some of their function to the host computer. The WinModem is a prime example. You can buy them cheaper than conventional modems because they don't have all the circuitry necessary to work as a modem. Those functions are replaced by software running on the host computer. As some of you may have discovered, this makes the functionality of the modem very dependent on the software drivers supplied by the distributor, and it can vary widely. The modem only functions under operating systems that explicitly

support it. Any changes or upgrades to your computer might prevent the modem from working.

Ironically, the new 'legacy free' machines have introduced another port. The CNR, which stands for "Communications and Network Riser", is intended to replace PCI slots for 'soft' network and modem boards similar to WinModems. While eliminating another legacy, they introduce an entirely new interface standard that will only make you more dependent on your operating system software. The few dollars you save will not make up for the effort to get those peripherals working.

If you're looking for a new computer, don't assume that 'legacy-free' is going to make things better. There's nothing wrong with a legacy that comes from a rich heritage.

Mike Berger, Director of Engineering



Cold and Flu season

Does your computer have the sniffles? It could, and exhibit no signs of malaise! The widespread destructiveness of the ILOVEYOU strain has once again brought computer viruses to the headlines, and renewed everyone's fear that they might be the next victim – a fear I hope to quell in the next few paragraphs.

First, a short description of the more *en vogue* virus types; categorically the Worm and the Trojan Horse. Both of these virus types have the same end goal, which is to spread themselves to as many 'hosts' as possible (read: your computer). The worm earned the name for a reason – this type will crawl deep into your system files to fulfill its primary purposes: replication and dispersion. The Trojan Horse is basically a worm that disguises itself as something innocuous or hitches on to a file that you are expecting to receive (that photo of Aunt Betty dropping the mashed potatoes in her lap), which could have a self-executing virus attached to it, without the sender's knowledge. E-mail has been the favorite target of recent types; Microsoft Outlook in particular, as, in its default setup, it will automatically open and run any email attachments carrying the .vbs or .exe extension. These Trojan horses have been very successful of late because of the ability of a .vbs driven virus to grab the Microsoft Outlook address book and send itself to everyone in it, with your email address as the sender. So you (or somebody you've inadvertently infected) open the E-mail, the virus tramps quietly through your system, and E-mails itself to all of your friends with a fairly irresistible title WITH YOUR NAME ON IT so they feel they should open it and see what you've sent. As soon as they do, the virus is now in their machine, looking for a way out, and sometimes seeing what damage it can do in the meantime.

Scared yet? Well, there are several things you can do. Let's start with the obvious: don't open any attachment that you're not expecting. Did your friend really mean to send you the E-mail with the subject 'WANTED 97 PEOPLE...? Probably not. Remember, the new trend in viruses is to replicate themselves through an E-mail address book, and it could just as easily be your friend's as your own. If you don't know, E-mail them and

ask if they intentionally sent it. If not, throw the whole E-mail away, without opening the attachment.

Next, purchase some virus software. The initial cost might seem steep (\$50 - \$75, depending on what package you purchase), but it's cheap compared to restoring your system and replicating your data! There are about 50 new viruses a week, and the comfort of owning a protection package that will allow you to constantly update your virus definitions quickly exceeds the purchase price.

Next tip? DON'T USE OUTLOOK! Most of the current viruses target Outlook because of its pervasiveness and its willingness to run .vbs scripts without prompting. Explore an alternate E-mail client such as Eudora or Netscape Messenger, which do not by default open Windows executables that virus authors are so fond of.

Lastly, keep your operating system and Internet browser up to date – you can download security patches from their respective web sites. These precautions should keep your system healthy and virus-free!

For those of you wishing to pursue antivirus software, here are three big players in the market:

Norton Anti-Virus: <http://www.symantec.com>

VirusScan/Virex(Macintosh):<http://www.networkassociates.com>

InoculateIT: <http://antivirus.cai.com>

All of these packages are available for download, and InoculateIT is free for personal home use, so what are you waiting for?

Jim Creason, Technical Support Associate



Just for You, From Microsoft

When you buy a new computer, an operating system usually comes with it. It's not free; the cost is bundled into your computer. Frequently there are no manuals or box, just a CD, which you need if you have to reinstall your operating system.

A recent trend, started by Microsoft, no longer includes the distribution CD with your new computer. Instead you get a 'restore' CD, which, under ideal circumstances, will restore your disk drive to the same state as when your computer was delivered. In other words, you'll lose all the software you loaded and customization that you performed.

What if you want to install a new disk drive? You won't be able to load the operating system from the restore CD. How about installing the software for your new digital camera? What if you need to insert the operating system CD for a library file or driver?

If you're purchasing a new computer, be sure that you get the complete distribution media for the bundled operating system and software, and not just a restore CD. You're paying for the software, and are entitled to a complete copy of it.

Mike Berger, Director of Engineering



