



The Gigaphone

July 2002
Vol. 4, No. 1

The Shouting Ground Newsletter

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From the Cubicle of the President ... State of the ISP

Welcome to another fun-packed edition of the Gigaphone! Summer has arrived (I think) and hopefully you're outside taking advantage of the weather and not stuck in front of your computer monitors like we are.

Two New Hires!

I'm pleased to announce that we have added two new people to the Shouting Ground family. Daniel "Dan" Byers has joined our technical support team and will be on hand to assist with Internet support issues. He will also be working with our computer network service and maintenance contracts. William "Bill" Cline has also joined us in our efforts to get organized and to efficiently handle whatever is thrown our way, so don't be surprised if you hear a new voice answering the phone during the course of the business day.

Need Hardware?

In other news, we've expanded our array of products and services to include server-related hardware sales. Need a new business-class server with the high-availability and security of RAID support? Perhaps your business needs to re-evaluate backup strategies or update virus protection software. Shouting Ground can now assist with not just Internet connectivity, but also the long-term planning of your business' internal IT needs. Give us a call at 877-33-SHOUT (or 217-351-7921) for a free consultation.

*Bryan Holloway,
President*



Web Page Statistics

So you've got your web site up and running and the visitors are flocking to it like ants at a picnic. Right? If you have a website hosted by our Virtual Hosting service you can know just how many visitors are viewing your page without using one of those ugly space-taking web counters. Just point your browser to www.shout.net/reports/host_name, replacing 'host_name' with the name of your website (usually www.company.com or just company.com). You'll be asked for your username and password, usually the same one you use to log into your UNIX shell. These reports are created on the 1st of each month, and statistics from previous months are also available. Try out www.shout.net/reports/host_name/log.MmmYYYY.html (Mmm being the first 3 letters of the month and YYYY the year) to get the statistics for that specified month and year. This information is intended only for the persons responsible for their website, which is why it is password protected. Enjoy!

*Bill Cline,
Office Assistant*

Just be Careful

E-mail is here to stay and unfortunately so are computer viruses. The most common form of virus these days is the E-mail attachment virus. If you haven't received one of these nasty surprises yet --- You will!

The reason these viruses spread so fast is that the E-mail will often come from someone you know. If a friend's computer becomes infected with one of these viruses, it will send out an infected E-mail to everyone in their E-mail address book, without your friend knowing it. When you get an infected E-mail it will look like a normal E-mail, with an attachment, from someone you know. If you open that attachment without updated virus protection, your computer will become infected and start sending out infected mail to everyone in your address book.

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A Night at the Opera

"A child of five could understand this. Fetch me a child of five"
--Groucho Marx

In the world of web browsers there's the one you use, and the other one, right? Not any more. With the release of version 6.0 (5.0 for Macintosh) Opera (www.opera.com) has become a mature, complete browser with many useful features that are missing from Netscape and Internet Explorer. Oh yeah, it's fast, too. And small. The Opera download is just 3.26MB (11.06MB with Java), as compared with Netscape 6's 24MB, and Internet Explorer's 15-22MB. Java notwithstanding, disk space requirements are even more telling: Opera takes up 5.4MB on my machine, Netscape 6 needs about 18MB, and IE6 can eat up 35-75MB depending on how many 'extras' you have installed. Opera's memory requirements are also typically a quarter to one-half of the other two. But enough about system requirements, let's get to the features, which is where Opera really shines.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Opera is what is termed the 'Multiple Document Interface'. What this means in the real world is that Opera opens one master window, and allows you to open multiple browser windows within the master window. Opening multiple pages in either NS or IE results in another instance of the program running on your machine, chewing up system resources in the process. I can (and usually do) have 15-20 windows open in Opera - try that in one of the others and watch your system crash, or at least slow down to a painful crawl. Why would one want to have so many windows? Think about doing an in-depth web search that takes you to several locations. If you open each link in a new window, you can refer back to previous locations by switching to the appropriate window instead of searching through your history or hitting the 'back' button

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Opera, *continued from front*

seventeen times. Until you've tried it, this feature may seem frivolous, after you have, you won't be able to do without it. Want to go to the store, and resume the web search later? Opera has an option to save windows on exit, so the next time you open the program, all your windows come right back.

Opera's main window has several nice features that also quickly become addictive. One is the search field built into each browser window. Mine is set to Google (the best search engine ever, period), so I can type 'barbecued eggplant' in this field and the window switches to Google's results – a real time saver. There are also built in search flags which you can use in the address window, for example typing 'z rosenkrantz and guildenstern are dead' will turn up everything on Amazon.com relating to Tom Stoppard's brilliant play. Another nice feature is the personal toolbar attached to the master window, to which you can add custom buttons, like a condensed version of your bookmark file with your most often visited sites. Also contained in the toolbar is a 'find in page' field, much handier than dragging your mouse up to Edit>Find..., then typing in the resulting pop-up window.

Speaking of pop-up windows, aren't all those ads annoying? One of the preferences allows you to disable these infuriating creatures, along with several other handy Java security settings, which allows quite a bit of control as to what cookies are accepted and/or refused. Opera does support Java, and version 6.0 handles Java much better than previous versions, but you will still run into a few sites (usually optimized for IE) that won't display properly, so don't trash that old browser yet, you'll still need it occasionally. Remember Opera is (for the time being) a relatively small percentage of the browser market, and many web designers only test their web pages for IE and NS, and often just IE. As Opera gains in popularity, which it is, this should become less and less of a problem.

For keyboard fans, Opera wins again. You can access just about any function from the keyboard – navigation, searching, window management, email, etc. There are nine pages of keyboard shortcuts in the help file, not that you need to learn them all, but I'm sure everyone will find one or two that are useful, like using the '1' and '2' keys to cycle between your open windows.

Mouse functionality is also nicely done. The gesturing features, which can take a little getting used to, quickly become indispensable: right-click, mouse-left for 'back' is a good example. The hotclick also has some unique features, aside from the usual copy text, you can also access a dictionary, encyclopedia, and several search engines by highlighting a word and right-clicking on it.

An E-mail client is also built into Opera, which can import settings and contacts from popular clients like Outlook Express (yuk!) or Eudora, or you can set Opera to use your existing client. The big disadvantage to this client is the lack of IMAP support, so users of this protocol won't want to switch. All the other features you'd expect from a mail client are there, though.

Speaking of cons, Opera isn't free, it's adware. This means you can download and use it for free, but there are omnipresent (but inoffensive) ads in the upper right corner, similar to the sponsored mode of Eudora 5.1. Once you get used to the browser, these are easily ignored. If you want to get rid of the ads, you have to register with Opera for \$39.

*Jim Creason,
Director of Support Services*

Just be Careful, *continued from front*

Several of these viruses have a built in E-mail program so that they can send out infected mail even if you do not have your own E-mail program open. All they require is a connection to the Internet. To make matters worse, if you are using Outlook or Outlook Express, because of the way these programs handle mail, your computer can become infected from some forms of E-mail viruses without even opening any attachments. Some recent ones include: Snow White, SirCam, Magistr, BadTrans, and My Party, all of which are mass mailing E-mail viruses.

What can you do? Just be careful! If you have an anti-virus program on your computer visit the company's web site and make sure that you have the most recent virus files for that program. If you don't have an anti-virus program on your computer GO BUY ONE! Most of these inexpensive programs have an annual subscription program that will automatically update these virus files, while others require you to download the updates manually. If you are using the manual update method, this should be done every two weeks at a minimum. Be sure to change the program's default settings to scan all files, not just executable files, and to scan all folders with no exceptions. Do not exclude the recycle/trash bin.

The second most important thing that you can do is to use common sense. If you receive an E-mail attachment from someone that you do not know do not open it, just delete it. Be especially wary of E-mail that uses poor English or has a nonsensical message. If you do know the person sending the attachment, but were not expecting them to send you something you must still be cautious. Call or E-mail them and ask them if they sent you the attachment. With a little preparedness and some common sense you can safely use E-mail to keep in touch with family, friends, and business associates.

*Steve Dyson,
Technical Support Associate*



Understanding Your Billing

As a customer of Shouting Ground Technologies, every month you will receive an INVOICE from us detailing your services for that particular month. The word INVOICE will be visible in the upper right hand corner. The Invoice number will be in a box right below that. The due date will be in a box half-way down the page, and the total for that month's services will be listed in the bottom right hand corner.

If you have over-paid us (intentionally or otherwise) or have neglected to pay us, you will also receive a STATEMENT from us, as well as an Invoice. The STATEMENT (noted in bold in the upper right hand corner) is a listing of your account's recent activity (usually six months' worth). The STATEMENT will show all Invoices and payments for that period. At the bottom right hand corner will be the total you actually owe. If the number is negative, that means you have overpaid and have credit with us. The STATEMENT is on light blue paper. When in doubt, pay the amount on the STATEMENT.

If you ever have any questions about your INVOICE or STATEMENT, feel free to call us at 217-351-7921 and ask for Jeff or e-mail <billing@shout.net>.