

MBTS TEKJOURNAL

Volume 4, Issue 1

February 2005

New Year, New Look

It has been too long since my last TekJournal and I guess the primary reason I have time now is this is my recovery period from Arthroscopic Surgery on my right knee. I am anticipating a marvelous recovery, for both my knee and this periodical.

I have been told that change is good. I hope so, because the TekJournal format is changing again. I want a format that is easy to read, portable, easier to post on the website, and easier to archive. So this style is more in line with traditional newsletters and tabloid newspapers. You will not see headlines like "Viruses ate my modem", or "My computer is spying on me", but you will see a more formal organization of content. You will also be able to print the TekJournal (using duplex printing if desired) to be able to take it with you.

I think the purpose of a good newsletter is to provide the readers, you, with information that is pertinent to your needs in a format that you find appealing and helpful. So 2005 is going to be the year that you, the reader, help define what all future issues will look like.

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1** New Year, New Look
- 1** Windows Media Centre PC's
- 2** System Invasion: Viruses, Spyware, etc.
- 4** Surf's Up
- 5** Tips & Tweaks
- 5** TekSpecials

The Future of the Family Room

Technology is wonderful! The turn of the 1900's brought us moving pictures. The 1930's brought us talking moving pictures. The 1950's brought the talking moving pictures into our homes. The late 70's early 80's had VHS battling with Beta for the home movie market. The 1990's brought us DVD, and the new Millennium has allowed Microsoft to put it all at our fingertips.

In October 2004, Microsoft announced, and released to the OEM channel, the latest version of the Windows XP Home Media Centre operating system. This version is the most full featured ever and separates the computer from the Media Centre with a remote control and the 10 foot multimedia optimized User Interface. This is like having two computers in one box.

While Windows XP media Centre Edition 2005 is only supposed to be sold with a complete new system, Microsoft does allow sales of the OEM version of the operating system if it is bundled with a non peripheral component, like a 200GB hard drive. But before you start calling and ordering this new system, see if your current computer has what it takes.

Since the Media Centre portion of the operating system is simply an overlaid desktop with severe multimedia capabilities, a Media Centre PC is like a high end gaming machine. Microsoft is supposedly very picky about the type of system that can run Media Centre, but they make it extremely difficult to locate the basic system requirements.

Since 1 hour of recorded TV requires approximately 2GB of disk space, it is safe to say you need a huge hard drive, something in the order of 200GB and up. One neat feature is being able to pause Live TV and then return to watching when the interruption is over. This is done by recording the Live TV to the hard drive

continued on page 3

Putting together a TekJournal requires about 24 hours of research, writing, proofing, and rewriting before it can be released. You can help in the research by pointing me in the right direction. Lots of users like Tips & Tricks to tweak their own system, but would you like articles on how to use Word, or Excel, or Media Centre, or something else? If you want help with an application I need you to be specific – ask for something like “Creating a spreadsheet to track mileage for tax deductions” or, “Using Columns and text formatting to create a newsletter in word” or “Basic web design with Frontpage”. As for Tips, Tricks, and Tweaks, I need to know what you want from your operating system: What annoys you, what would you like to improve, what would you like to automate if possible.

So here we go, building a technical newsletter that I enjoy writing with input from the audience. Participation isn't mandatory but it is welcomed. The only really dumb question is the one you don't ask. So send me your questions and I will publish them all anonymously in future issues.☺

System Invasion

When we first started using PC's we thought we were invincible and that nothing could touch us, and then came the viruses. It actually took a long time for the first virus to appear in 1986 and it was called The Brain. It was a boot sector virus that infected floppy diskettes, making the disk unusable.

In 1988, the first anti virus software to was released and by 1990 many similar products were available from Norton, McAfee, and IBM to name a few. Since then however viruses have become the norm to thwart our efforts to have clean safe computers.

Even though the Internet has been around for a long time, it was widely used until the early 90's and today we seem to think it has always been part of our life. The Internet made it easier for viruses to spread since not every user has taken the care to make sure their system is equipped with functioning anti virus software. But it seems we are winning the war against viruses and even though they are still with us, many of the new ones are simply reworked original viruses that have been modified to take advantage of new security leaks.

However, in our typical shortsighted reasoning we never imagined anything would replace the virus. Once we had it licked we should have been free from system corruption. Then along came Spyware, Dialers, and other malware to infect our systems and make us cringe when things don't run properly. But how do we get infected?

If you were to use an original IBM PC today you would wonder how you ever got anything done. We didn't originally build systems in terms of megabytes and gigabytes and processing speeds weren't really fast, but they were adequate for their time. But technology has given us super fast systems and we no longer want to wait for programs to install, we want them to be available immediately.

Another aspect of the newest technology generation is that we want everything for free. So if someone offers a free program like KaZaA, we want to download it and get it installed as quickly as possible which means very few of us read the fine print or anything else on the screen. In doing so, we give the authority of our system over to a third party and let them do as they please, infecting our systems at will and then we wonder how it happened.

What is the definition of “Free”? Monetarily, Webster's dictionary describes it as having no cost, or being gratuitous as in a free meal. However, the definition also states that “free” is “not affected or restricted by a given condition or circumstance.” So when we consider “free” software like KaZaA – is it really Free? NO!

“Free” software often comes with a tag along program from a company wanting information about you so it in turn can help other companies sell their products. This tag along software is commonly known as Spyware. Software is still expensive to write and everyone wants to be paid for their work, but no one wants to pay for KaZaA. So the designers of KaZaA would sell access to third party companies for an incredibly small fee allowing these third party's to attach additional software to search our systems to record information about us to be used against us in some form of marketing campaign. It should be illegal as it is invasion of privacy, but so far it is still in the legal grey

continued on page 3

area. But you can fight back

In November/December 2004, Microsoft acquired a new company which writes anti Spyware software and immediately released a beta version of this software available completely free and without strings to all users of Windows XP and later operating systems. Click here for [Microsoft's Anti Spyware Beta 1](#). (or go to <http://www.microsoft.com> and look under popular downloads)

With Spyware running rampant and seeming to overtake the number of viruses available today, no system should be left unprotected. If you are unsure of which product to use, this is a good place to start, but remember – you get what you pay for. To install Microsoft's Anti Spyware simply download the file to your desktop and double click it to install. Follow and select all the defaults. The only prompt you may want to opt out of is to join the Spyware community. I don't like to let anybody collect info from my system, not even Microsoft.

Once the product has been installed it is set up to run automatically when your computer starts. If your start up program list is modified, this software determines it's source and will prompt you to accept or decline the change unless it is from a trusted source. When Spyware is detected you will be notified with a description of the threat, where it is located, it's risk factor, and a recommended action. This allow you to take a proactive approach to safeguarding your system.

If you prefer to purchase your software protection the best I have found so far is available from Webroot and a free 30 day trial can be downloaded from the [SpySweeper](#) site.

(<http://www.webroot.com/products/spysweeper/?rc=1651>) Click the Download link and look under the heading Try It. The cost of the product is \$ 29.95 US and includes one year of updates for Spyware traces and programs. During a scan, Spysweeper checks the memory for programs currently running which shouldn't, checks the System Registry for traces which fit the profiles in the database, and finally all the files on your hard drive for files which don't belong. Many of the traces found may be in the form of cookies, but

this product will identify more than any other so far. While nothing is infallible, the continually updated database currently identifies over 56,000 different traces which can harm your system, slow it down, promote pop ups, and potentially force you to reinstall losing everything you have work for so far.☹

continued from page 1

and when you are ready going back to watch the recorded part while the remainder of the program is still being recorded if necessary. Therefore, not only is a large hard drive required, but a fast one too. Serial ATA offers transfer speeds at a 50% increase over older IDE technology, but if your system doesn't have that capability but does support RAID, you may still be okay.

A processor whose operating speed is over 2 GHz and at least 512MB of fast DDR RAM is a good starting point for multimedia since your new system will definitely be multi-tasking. You will also require a high end graphics card with an S-Video connector to send the signal to your TV. Some new LCD and Plasma TV's have analog and/or digital DVI connectors for connecting the PC.

Sound is a very personal thing and will always be left to each individual user as to what is required. Some motherboards now incorporate 5.1 digital sound, and the option is always available to use a third party like Creative Labs. But, the more speakers you have, the close to the real theatre experience you will get.

Optical drives, DVD ROM and RW, are a must so that you can view DVD's and make your own. The DVD RW drive will also create CD-R disks so you can still create your own music CD's. With the computer being the focal point of the Family Room you will also want a Wireless Keyboard and Mouse so you are not chained to a desk. It really is a blast to check your email during a commercial break without leaving your easy chair.

The final piece of the puzzle is the TV Tuner and Remote Control. The Microsoft IR remote works very well and is priced aggressively, but there are

many different tuners available. Single or Dual is always an option, but since this is the first year Media Centre has allowed dual tuners there are still problems configuring them properly. More tuners can always be added later so you may want to start with a single tuner card to make sure you can enjoy this new experience.

Word Processing and other normal computer functions may not transfer to a TV optimally so you may also want to consider a Flat Panel LCD monitor since this unit will be in the Family Room and traditional monitors are clunky. Setting up your Family Room to adopt this new unit will be covered in a future newsletter.

Now that you have a Media Centre system, what can you do with it? Read on...

My TV: The TV tuner adapts to your local cable provider with a little help from the connection wizard. It took me about two minutes to set up MTS TV and I was off and recording. The software can automatically download a guide schedule for up to two weeks of future programming so you can select what you want to watch and record completely on screen. You can set up recording to happen in the background while you are using the computer for other things, and if you are watching and get interrupted, there is a PVR function to pause Live TV and resume later. High Definition isn't supported yet, but is a feature that will be coming very soon.

My Videos: Once you have recorded programs saved on your hard drive you can access them as simply as you currently access your songs in Media Player. You can even burn them to optical media to free up disk space and watch them later.

My Music: This option has a lot more meat than the standard Windows Media Player. A favourite feature is Queue which allows you to surf through your song list and build play lists while songs are being played. In a typical Media Player once you click on a second song the first one stops and the second one plays.

My Pictures: Think about watching all your digital pictures from a recent outing or holiday with music playing in the background. Now consider that Windows Movie Maker 2.1 in Media Centre can burn this to DVD. Photo printing has also been incorporated into this feature.

Media Extenders: With many set top boxes from your cable provider you are stuck with the good stuff on only one TV. A media extender working via a wireless Ethernet connection can transport all the functionality from the main TV to other TV's in your house. You will no longer be limited to having all the media content just in the Family Room.

Another future consideration from Microsoft will be a new X Box with media extender software allowing your gaming system to double as a multi media center as well.

All in all, Microsoft is changing the way we think of multimedia and how we will access programming, videos, photographs, and music for years to come.▯

Surf's Up...

There really is a little kid in all of us even though we have supposedly grown up. To help release your inner child hop on over to the new [Muppets](http://muppets.com) site at muppets.com. This is where frogs sing, bears joke, and pigs fly.

Names can always be deceiving. Think about Butt Ugly Software (www.buttuglysoftware.com) and I will bet that a great little utility for keeping junk files like the Temporary Internet Files, Temp Folder, cached

URL's, etc. off your computer would be the last image you would imagine. Guess again. This is the home of [Clean Cache](#), a great little utility for doing just that. (Requires Microsoft's .Net Framework and Windows XP to operate.)

Do you have an analytical mind? Do you like to cook? Then [Cooking for Engineers](#) (www.cookingforengineers.com) may be just the site you have been searching for. This is the site that can answer all your metric cooking conversion with the click of a command button. Lots of recipes too.▯

Tips & Tweaks

NOTE – Modifying System Files is not recommended. These procedures may contain information regarding editing the System Registry. You should make sure you have a valid System Registry backup before attempting any of these modifications. Incorrect editing may severely and irreparable damage your operating system. MicroByte TekSolutions takes no responsibility for the health or stability of your system should you attempt to implement any modification found herein.

Faster Network Browsing

If you have a network set up in your home, or small office, and you want to achieve faster network access this tweak may help you. For some reason, browsing a network drive causes Windows to unnecessarily search the computer's scheduled tasks folder. This can be turned off easily.

Using REGEDIT navigate to locate the key HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\RemoteComputer\NameSpace. Next look for the subkey labeled {D6277990-4C6A-11CF-8D87-00AA0060F5BF} and delete it. Reboot Windows for the change to take effect.

Eliminate the Shared Docs folder

If you don't have a network setup in your home or office and you find your system a little cluttered, you can remove the Shared Documents folder. Using REGEDIT locate and Delete the key

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\MyComputer\Namespace\DelegateFolders\{59031a47-3f72-44a7-89c5-5595fe6b30ee}. We strongly urge you to make a backup of this key before you delete it so it may be put back at a later date if required.

Quick Image Resizing

How many of you have Digital Camera's and use your computer like a photo album? Anyone who does this knows that the pictures a digital camera takes would fit on a billboard in their native format. Unless you have a special tool, most of us must change the size of the pictures one at a time. Microsoft has a Power Toy for resizing digital images and it can be found at <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xppowertoys.mspx> Once the self extracting file has been installed you can resize a single image or a group of images with just a Right Click.

Disable CD Burning

This tip may only be for System Administrators who want to make sure the data on their systems stays there. Use REGEDIT to navigate to HKEY_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\Explorer. Next right click on the right pane and add a new DWORD value called NoCDBurning and give it a value of 1 to disable burning CD's and 0 to allow burning.

TEKSPECIALS

I have one refurbished computer system in stock with the following specifications: AMD Athlon 1.3 GHz processor with 512MB RAM, 40GB HDD, CD ROM, CD RW, Windows XP Professional, and Microsoft Wireless Desktop Keyboard and Optical Mouse.

Sacrifice \$ 550.00 plus taxes 90 day warranty Delivery included

Windows Media Centre 2005

Conversion kit – Windows XP Media Centre 2005 operating system, Microsoft Media Centre Remote with IR Blaster, Hauppauge 150 TV Tuner with Media Centre Driver **\$ 365.00** plus taxes (installation extra)

Notebook Specials

(subject to availability)

Acer TravelMate 2702WLCI – Intel P4 3.0GHz, 2x256MB RAM, 80GB HDD, DVD/CD RW Combo, Wireless Ethernet, 15.4 inch WXGA, Windows XP Pro **\$ 1,551.00** plus taxes

Acer Aspire 1522LMI – AMD Athlon 3000+, 2x256MB RAM, 80GB HDD, DVD Dual Drive, Wireless Ethernet, 15 inch XGA, Windows XP Pro **\$ 1,561.00** plus taxes

Acer TravelMate 4502LMi – Intel Pentium M 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, 80GB HDD, DVD Writer, Windows XP Pro **\$ 1,727.00** plus Taxes