

About the Cover:

This cover assignment proves that a professional deadline can be met despite a summer head cold and shuttling an aged, infirm family member from home to hospital and, finally, into hospice care—but Aaron doesn't recommend it.

Cover Artist:

Aaron St. John

At a time of passage and mortality, Aaron was pleased to be able to focus on creating an image of abundance. For reasons too long and silly to go into, the family member mentioned above has been known variously as Harry and David. Those are "Harry & David" pears spilling out of the Cornucopia, just for him.

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edge **W O R D**

The theme of the Internet and restaurants has me thinking about ways of approaching Web reservations for eateries. I know there are services that take reservations for multiple restaurants, and they seem to work pretty well. However, I like to speculate about how I would build a Web-reservation system if I owned a restaurant and wanted to do an in-house, Web-based system. There are probably a number of businesses in food service that *do* handle everything themselves.

First, to make a Web system most effective, it should be used by the employees of the business as well as the consumer. In a reservation system, the first step would be to design a Web site that would be used for all reservations, regardless of whether they are made over the phone, by e-mail, or directly on the Web. Whoever handles reservations over the phone would use the same Web site as the customers. This serves a number of purposes.

First, the employees learn how the Web system works and can help customers when they have problems. The employees experience firsthand what the Web surfer is going through with each click. This puts them in a position to make recommendations about how to change and improve things on the site.

With a more full-featured version of the Web-reservation system available to managers, the central Web-reservation system becomes an extended business tool for the restaurant. Since all the information is flowing into a single point, it becomes easier to identify trends and possible trouble points. Literally everyone, including the customers and the managers, are operating from the same page: the Web page. The Web as a tool becomes an integral part of day-to-day business.

Next, there are gains found in building a Web relationship with regular—or soon to be regular—clients. Asking for an e-mail address is a normal part of any online reservation system. This allows immediate confirmation of the booking, which also validates the address and, hopefully, the customer. At this point, the user can be offered an opportunity to receive special discounts in the future by joining an opt-in private e-mail list. This is a tremendous tool for creating a higher level of customer interaction, and it also improves revenues. If there is a particularly slow season, the e-mail list can be notified overnight that there will be a special menu or exceptional offers, filling tables that normally would be left vacant. Plus, a regular restaurant e-mail newsletter would remind patrons that they haven't been in to enjoy the atmosphere lately.

On the day of the reservation, the patrons of each table booked would be reminded of their reservation via e-mail and asked to notify the restaurant if there are any changes. The e-mail would include a link to take them directly to the pending reservation. This reduces the possibility of no-shows.

Once a Web-based business system is established—and the company gets used to doing business that way—other features can be added to the system. Wouldn't it be nice for the customers to see that night's menu? This would be easy if the chef actually planned the menu on the Web and hit a Publish button when done. The leads to the possibility of directly linking the menus to supplies. The possibilities are endless.

Jack Dunning, Publisher
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Mortgage Payments on the Web

■ [This letter is in regard to Jack Dunning's July 14 Edgeword about paying mortgages over the Web.]

[Dunning's] rationale for paying his mortgage the old-fashioned way makes perfect sense to me. I used to work for a large corporate bank, and the pressure to produce more and more revenue while reducing costs wherever possible resulted in some decisions that I personally found ludicrous (office supplies under lock and key is a bad sign—filling out a business case to buy paper clips is worse), and [Dunning's] mortgage company's attempt to bill [him] for making extra money [for the company] is just adding insult to injury.

I'd have done the same thing.

Fred Loucks-Schultz,
Denver, CO

■ [Regarding Jack Dunning's July 14 Edgeword,] amen! It just ticks me off when a company wants to charge for a service it pro-

vides when, if we use it, it saves *them* money, such as the case [Dunning] stated and things like bank ATMs. I have to go into my bank to make deposits, using teller time, instead of using the machine right outside because I won't pay the \$10 annual fee for a [debit] card.

Art Newpher,
North Palm Beach, FL

editor's LETTERS

edletters@computoredge.com

■ Regarding [Jack Dunning's July 14] Edgeword on online mortgage payments, way to go, Jack!

I, too, have a similar problem. Mine is with my credit card.

If I want to pay my bill using the Internet, my due date is 15 days after the statement cycles. Yet, if I want to send in a check through the mail, my payment due date is 30 days from the statement cycle date.

But I can't just walk around the corner the way you can to hand the company my paper check on day 30. From where I live in Denver, it's a long hike to South Dakota, the credit card capital of the world. And because it takes me as long to write the check as to pay online, I concede the matter and save the paper.

When I asked the credit card company to automatically debit my bank account each month for the credit card payment, it said that its computer systems were not yet set up to do bank-to-bank auto-debits through the ACH (Automated Clearing House; it was established by banks and the Federal Reserve in 1974 to pave the way for the checkless society). But there's hope: [The credit card company] says it's working on it.

I don't know about you, but I feel like I lose more time struggling to conform to this high-tech world than I save by encumbering myself with its advantages. I rented the 1976 movie *Network* last night, and I, too, feel like scream-

ing, "I'm mad as @#!%, and I won't take this any longer!"

D.G. Bryant
Denver, CO

■ [Regarding Jack Dunning's July 14 Edgeword,] I wonder if we have the same mortgage company; mine has a sliding scale for making payments within grace periods, and I think it stinks. One possible solution I have been considering is using a separate online bill-pay service to make the mortgage payment, rather than use the mortgage company site.

So far, I have adjusted by making payments closer to the scheduled date and not extending greatly into the grace period.

Joe Galaska
Evergreen, CO

Flexible LCDs

■ Great article! I read *ComputerEdge* and many other trade magazines to try to stay up with technology, [only] to find out that I am four years behind.

Keep up the good work!

Richard Mowry



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DIGITAL DAVE

Dear Digital Dave,

How do you determine the “up” side for a CD for insertion in the drive? A knowledgeable friend says to use them the way they come out of the stack. But this could get confusing.

Charles Forman

Dear Charles,

Well, your friend must buy his or her CD-Rs at the same place I do, because

I’ve never found one that was upside down, and I’ve burned my way through a lot of CD-Rs. The manufacturers are pretty good about putting the label-side up, so you can just take a disc out of the pile and place it in your CD writer drive.

Just for the heck of it, I once tried putting a CD-R in the drive upside down. The drive did not recognize the disc at all. It acted as if there was nothing in the drive. So, even if you do get it wrong, there is no harm done; just turn it over and try again.

Most better-quality CD-Rs and DVD+/-Rs come with some printing on the label side. That makes it even easier to keep track of which way is up.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

I’d like to add something to Jim Haynes’ question in the June 16 issue regarding DC adapters for laptops. It would be easier to look

for a DC-to-AC power inverter instead of looking for a DC adapter that matches a laptop’s power.

A DC-to-AC inverter uses the 12 VDC outlet in cars to output 120 VAC; you can connect your laptop’s AC adapter or whatever 120-VAC device you want—just be careful not to exceed the inverter’s maximum output power. You can find power inverters at Wal-Mart or Target stores.

Silverio Reyes
Tijuana, B.C.

Dear Silverio,

You are right. A DC-to-AC inverter is cheaper and easier to find. They are cheaper because their use is more generic, and easier to find for the same reason.

An advantage of using the inverter is that you can use it to power other devices from your car’s cigarette lighter, too. If you buy a new laptop, you can power that in your car, as well.

This brings up a point. Make sure you buy an inverter that comes with a

nice cigarette-lighter plug to make a connection convenient. The other side should be a standard-line power receptacle that you can plug your normal computer power adapter into.

The disadvantage of the inverter is that you have to lug around both the inverter and the normal computer power adapter. On most trips you have to have both anyway, so no big deal.

There are very few computer power adapters available that can take either 12 VDC from your car or 120 VAC from your house power. That’s the ideal solution, but it’s probably expensive.

The other possible drawback to the inverter/power adapter combination is that this solution is not quite as efficient, and will draw a bit more power from your car battery. If you are using it for short periods or while the engine is running, this shouldn’t be a concern. Only with long-term use—say, at a camping site—would you have to worry about it.

(continued on page 10)

Digital Dave’s Tip

It happened again yesterday. I’m at work, and I get an invitation to a meeting via Outlook. I spend half my life at meetings! I dutifully check the meeting room location in Outlook, trudge to the room, and plunk myself down. About 15 minutes in, I realize that I’m in the wrong meeting.

I open my laptop and recheck Outlook. Sure enough, the meeting room I am in is not listed as a resource on the invitation list. Meanwhile, the meeting organizer was running around the halls looking for a new room for his meeting, and had no way to tell the invitees.

Outlook, part of Microsoft Office, is used by many (most) companies to schedule meetings and swap e-mail. If used properly, Outlook can work pretty darn well, but if you miss a simple trick, it’s a disaster.

The trick is that, when scheduling meetings, you *must* book the meeting room as a resource. This is not obvious.

You would think that just typing in the names of the invitees on the Appointment tab would make it happen,

and this does work fine for all the *people*. To get the room reservation right, you have to dig a little deeper.

First, go to the Scheduling tab. The people who are invited should have a red icon with an up arrow if they accepted the invitation. If the room is booked and has a red arrow, you have trouble.

The room should have a little green house-looking icon if it is truly booked. To get it right, you can go to the Add Others button and Add From Address Book or a Public Folder.

Now, here is the important part. When you select the conference room from the list, you have to go down to the bottom button labeled Resources. You must invite the room as a resource.

When you send the invitations, you should get a confirmation back that the resource has been booked successfully. You have the option of turning off this message, but don’t do it.

Get that confirmation every time, and check your list to see that little green house. Then, when you face off with the other meeting organizer who claims your meeting room, you can ask them if they got their little green house. □

DAVE

(continued from page 8)

A good size for an inverter is something around 150 watts. These are pretty small and inexpensive. I found one at Harborfreight.com (www.harborfreight.com) for less than \$20.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,
On my last PC, using Outlook Express, I somehow had the Bcc line there between the Cc and Subject line when I opened a new e-mail to compose.

Now, only the To and Cc lines appear, and I have to click the Cc to have a box open that

includes the Bcc.

Is there any way to have the Bcc line there by default?

Frank J.

Dear Frank,

I knew there was a control in Outlook Express to turn the Bcc line on and off, but it took me a while to find it. It's not on the Tools/Options window where things like this usually live.

Click on the little down arrow to the right of the Options icon on the Send toolbar. Strangely, this gives you a different set of options than the Tools/Options menu item does.

After getting this dropdown menu, check the Bcc item. Now, the Bcc line

will show up in the header of your message.

Digital Dave

Dear Digital Dave,

In the June 30 issue, Ernie wrote in about his mysteriously replicating photo files. I have occasionally had this same problem, and it is not caused by a virus. When selecting multiple files using the Ctrl key in Windows Explorer, you can accidentally create duplicates.

This happens when you inadvertently hold down the left mouse button and move the cursor. The combination of holding down both the Ctrl key and the left mouse button is the

Windows standard for copying a file.

If this happens, the easiest way to undo it is to right-click on an empty area of the window and choose Undo Copy. For some reason, I tend to do this more often when using the thumbnail view of pictures than with the other views.

Barry L. Wallis

Dear Barry,

Another detective story solved! Not only did you figure out the strange combination that is causing all the repeated photo file copies, but you supplied a way to back out of the mistake, too. Thanks!

Digital Dave

DIGITAL DAVE de·fines:

Restaurants and Eateries

COUPON SUBSCRIPTION: Many restaurant and coupon Web sites provide a subscription service. You sign up for an account and give your name and e-mail address as a minimum. I had one subscription to a fish restaurant that would send me a coupon for a free dinner, no strings attached—except that I had to collect it on my birthday. Most people are busy going to their own birthday party and aren't free for dinner on that day, but at least it reminds me of my birthday a few days before! You can usually filter the coupons you receive to only those restaurants you are interested in or categories of restaurants you like. By signing up, you are essentially giving the coupon site the green light to send you spam—but a little spam with your breakfast can taste good.

FOOD & BEVERAGE ONLINE: One of the areas on the CouponMountain Web site is labeled Food & Beverage (www.couponmountain.com/Food_&_Beverage.html). Here you can find all sorts of discounts on eating out. Coupons range from a free sandwich at Arby's to \$3 off an ice cream cake at Baskin Robbins, to the *Entertainment Book*, which has coupons for hundreds of restaurants all over the country. Many restaurants offer coupons on their Web sites, but you would have to spend many hours to find them all. CouponMountain brings you updates a couple

of times per day. If you want to make your meals yourself, go to the Cooking.com area of the site (www.couponmountain.com/Cooking.com-coupons-deals.html), where there are many deals on kitchen items.

H.O.T!: The nice thing about the H.O.T! Coupons Web site (www.hotcoupons.com) is that you can enter your ZIP code and immediately find coupons for great deals at restaurants near where you live. This ultra-localization saves wading through lots of coupons for eateries on the far side of town, where it would cost more for gas to get there than the coupon is worth.

READER: Many cities have a publication called the *Reader*, or something similar. In San Diego, of course, it's called the *San Diego Reader*, and its Restaurant Coupons page (www.sdreader.com/php/qlist.php?prefix=rest) has a huge selection to choose from. That 50-percent-off-the-entire-check coupon for the Star of India restaurant is especially valuable. The coupon is good only Sunday through Thursday, but we like to avoid the crowds on Friday and Saturday night anyway. You can print the coupon for yourself, or even e-mail it to someone and tell them to meet you there. It's up to you to decide who gets to claim the "50-percent off" part of the bill.

SPONSORED OFFER: How about a lobster dinner for two for free? No other pur-

chase necessary! There has to be a catch— isn't there always? First of all, you must provide your e-mail address before you can even find out what the sponsor wants, meaning the company can sell your e-mail address to all the spammers in the world. My address is probably already known by every one of them, so no sweat there. There is usually some qualifying event, such as signing up and being approved for a credit card account. That credit card account might have an annual fee that exceeds the cost of a pair of lobsters. So, the dinner isn't free after all. It might be a good deal, but read the fine print before signing up. The free dinner might have a ridiculously short expiration date too, so watch out.

ZAGAT: Anyone who travels a lot recognizes the name Zagat. The company publishes many books with reviews on restaurants, hotel accommodations, and many other aspects of visiting a strange place. Now, there is Zagat Online (www.zagat.com), where you can access the reviews electronically. For local restaurant reviews, I go to the *San Diego Reader* Web site (www.sdreader.com), where the reviews are fresh and free. If I traveled a lot for my job and had to entertain clients, I would spend the money on a Zagat subscription and have access to quick and meaningful reviews of restaurants and nightlife in whatever city I happened to be in.



Zagat Online

By Kirk Kirksey

Once upon a time (way back in 1979), two Yale-educated lawyers lived in New York City. Their names were Tim and Nina Zagat. Tim and Nina loved to go to restaurants. Finding a good restaurant in New York is easy. They are everywhere. Finding the *best* restaurants in New York City is hard—there are simply too many possibilities.

One day, Tim and Nina were at a party drinking wine with some of their friends. Party talk turned to the restaurant reviews in the *New York Times*. (I know this sounds strange to many of our younger readers, but back in the olden days, people didn't have the Internet, and they found restaurants, news, jobs, used carburetors, and lots of other things by reading the newspaper.)

One of Tim and Nina's wine-drinking pals had a problem with this. He said the restaurant reviewer for the *New York Times* was a boob. After all, a restaurant review in the newspaper was strictly the opinion of a single individual—the writer. Sometimes the review was OK, but sometimes the writer missed the mark altogether.

Hmm. Tim had an idea. He

thought lots of "foodies" would be better than one newspaper writer, so why not let a bunch of people rate a single restaurant? He asked everybody at the party to put down their wine glasses, get out some paper and their \$350 ballpoints, and rate a restaurant. After the party, Tim and Nina got more of their friends who owned \$350 pens to rate New York City restaurants. They sent out the results: a free mimeographed restaurant guide of 100 New York City eateries, based on the opinions of more than 200 diners, rather than a single newspaper writer.

Tim and Nina's first restaurant review was a hit. Their friends loved it. Someone at Citibank made 3,000 copies of the guide without asking. Soon, the now world-famous *Zagat Survey* restaurant review and ratings guide was born. Tim and Nina got filthy rich.

Zagat Gets Big

If you've ever cruised the travel section of the local bookstore, chances are the *Zagat Survey* has caught your eye. It has a distinctive, but unadorned, maroon cover and is taller and skinnier than most other books you'll find. Paper versions are

by city.

Even though the Zagat organization is now into rating hotels, shopping, golf, music and nightlife, the restaurant guide by city is the company's shining star and is considered by many to be the premier city guide to fine dining. The original 100-restaurant New York City edition now covers some 1,900-plus dining establishments in the city's five boroughs. For you West Coasters, the Los Angeles/Southern California survey carries reviews for 1,740-plus restaurants in Los Angeles, Orange County, Palm Springs, Santa Barbara and more. If a trip is in your future, Zagat publishes surveys for most major cities in the United States and Canada, as well as for Europe.

The *Zagat Surveys* are still based on Tim's original idea—that there is strength and accuracy in numbers. In the company's marketing parlance, this means "[The] *Zagat Survey*'s trusted ratings and reviews for area restaurants are based on the opinions of diners like you." Today, the Zagat organization gathers opinions from more than 250,000 "voters" worldwide.

For restaurants, the reviews are

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Zagat

(continued from page 14)

based on a simple rating system of four factors: food, décor, service and price. Food, décor and service are each rated on a scale of 0 (poor to fair) to 30 (extraordinary to perfection). Price ratings, based on the surveyor's estimate of dinner, drinks and tip, range from I (inexpensive) to VE (very expensive). In addition, *Zagat* editors condense voter's comments into a short description. Sometimes they are even fun to read ("So if your Gulfstream is in the shop and you can't go to Paris, this is the place."—Aurora's in Dallas).

Zagat Goes Digital

For the first 20 years, the *Zagat Survey* was published only on (yuck) paper, but in 1999 things changed. *Zagat* came to the Web. Judging from early traffic (the first *Zagat* Web site got 7 million hits in the first two weeks), digital *Zagat* would prove to be a stellar success. Even though *Zagat*'s first site was populated with information gathered on paper surveys, the power of the Web was apparent from the get-go. As Tim and Nina put it in a 1999 blog entry, "It offers combinations of information that books are far too

brittle to yield." So true.

On the Web, for example, a diner can use simple search techniques to find a romantic, inexpensive restaurant with a fireplace, and get driving instructions to boot. To save space, *Zagat*'s paper incarnation publishes reviews only for places that meet a very minimal standard grade. But the company's Web site "is not so merciful." For the dining masochist who wants an overpriced but horrible dining experience, *Zagat*'s Web site is the place to find the worst of the worst.

Back in 1999, Tim and Nina "pondered" the potential of the new digi-

**Once you're
a Zagat online
you have a robust
vehicle to find
your fun.**

tal format. Clearly, *Zagat*'s digital potential has continued to grow. If you're living a strictly digital life, you can subscribe to the *Zagat* Web site (www.zagat.com) for a small fee. Full access to all *Zagat* surveys will run you \$24.95 for a 365-day subscription. For short-timers and cheapskates (that would be me), a 30-day full subscription is \$4.95. Devoted foodies may want only

Zagat's online restaurant review for \$19.95 for 365 days, or \$3.95 for 30 days. Road warriors can check out the *Zagat*'s to Go offering for PDAs at \$29.95.

Once you're a *Zagat* online, you have a robust vehicle to find your fun. Full-service subscribers can search for restaurants, nightlife, hotels and attractions—theme parks, malls, museums, aquariums and more. Search and viewing options abound. For restaurants, you can choose a city and do a keyword search. Other options include browsing by one of eight categories, including New, Ratings, Cuisines, and Neighborhoods. My personal browsing target is Bathrooms to Visit under the Features selection.

* * *

Back in 1979, Tim and Nina *Zagat* knew eating out could be tough, and relying on a single opinion in a newspaper might not be the best way to pick a restaurant. They had a better idea. Today, the *Zagat Survey*, both paper and online, is the recognized leader for discriminating foodies around the world. □

Check out Kirk Kirksey's new book, *Computer Factoids: Tales From the High-Tech Underbelly*, available at Amazon.com and www.computerfactoid.com.

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8	6	4	3	7	5	9	1	2
3	9	6	2	8	4	1	7	5
7	4	8	1	5	9	2	3	6
2	5	1	7	3	6	8	9	4

Restaurant Coupons Online

By Michael J. Ross

In our fast-paced Internet age, filled with too much e-mail and too few home-cooked meals, you could easily fear that the relaxed joys of delicious food would have little in common with the hyperkinetic and bland world of computers. In fact, for many hard-core computer users, the only time that cyberspace meets fridge space is when they dribble pizza grease onto a keyboard, or slowly turn a computer mouse orange while nosing on an artificially colored snack.

Yet, for people with more balanced diets (and more balanced lives!), computers and the Internet are making it easier than ever to enjoy good food—such as discovering tantalizing new recipes, locating cooking classes in your area, ordering specialty foods not available locally, or simply organizing and sharing your favorite recipes.

However, not everyone has the time or inclination for concocting their own culinary delights, and would much rather pay to have someone else do all the cooking and cleaning. That's just one of many reasons why restaurants are so popular in the United States. But with food and transportation costs in-

creasing at rates much higher than the “cooked” statistics provided by the federal government, almost everyone can appreciate any (ethical) method of reducing the financial burden of dining out.

This is where restaurant coupons can help. But nowadays, a growing number of people are getting their news exclusively from the Internet or cable TV instead of newspapers. As a consequence, these individuals usually miss out on the restaurant coupons typically found in the food sections of newspapers. Fortunately, the Internet can be useful for finding coupons and other special deals being offered to the hungry computer user.

All You Can Eat

You might assume that the widest selections of restaurant and other food coupons would be found on Web sites devoted to online coupons. Of course, this would be limited to the coupon sites that actually have a section that focuses on national eateries. After all, there are countless coupon sites that appear to deal only with electronics and other home-entertainment equipment.

There are a fair number of major coupon sites that include offerings

from restaurants. For example, CouponMountain (www.couponmountain.com) has deals from several dozen restaurants and online food merchants in its Food & Beverage section (click the link on the left of the screen). Like many other such sites, CouponMountain has coupons only for national restaurants, such as Arby's, Denny's, and Papa John's—never the obscure or single-location restaurants.

Wow-Coupons (www.wow-coupons.com) may have one of the cheesiest and most annoying Web sites, but it has a decent number of eateries represented, ranging from mainstream places such as Bennigan's, to sugar dealers such as Baskin-Robbins, along with various fast-food joints and delis. At the time of this writing, there were 33 total coupons listed. Each entry summarizes the terms of the coupon, the expiration date (if any), and a link to the locator tool on each vendor's Web site.

One downside to the general coupon sites that try to cater to all regions is that they end up being able to offer coupons only from the nationwide (or international) restaurants. As a result, the number and variety of dining establishments tend to be fairly limited. For instance, MyCoupons has a section of its site devoted to restaurants (www.mycoupons.com/browse/14/1) with six listings, only two of which are actual restaurants. Even worse, both of

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Coupons

(continued from page 18)

these coupons are for Pizza Hut!

This lack of quantity and diversity is likely a result of region-specific restaurants not being applicable to coupon sites that do not offer regional searches, and the nationwide restaurants not having any need for the extra marketing. Even though their marketing budgets would undoubtedly allow for them to be listed on these coupon sites, they probably see little need, given how most consumers are already quite familiar with the major chain restaurants.

From the Horse's Hungry Mouth

If you already have a strong notion as to which restaurant you would like to visit, then your best option is to go straight to the Web site for that particular restaurant. Most such companies will include on their sites all of the deals and special offers that you could find on any of the coupon sites, or at least a way to receive them via e-mail. In fact, those coupon sites will often simply list links that take the visitor directly to each restaurant's site.

For example, the Pizza Hut site has a Great Deals section (www.pizzahut.com/coupons) that allows visitors to find all of the coupons offered within their ZIP code. In addition, pizza addicts who wish to be notified of future offerings can provide their

e-mail address (or the e-mail address of a friend who could use a few more pounds!). At the time of this writing, there were six coupons offered within my ZIP code.

Bennigan's does not appear to have a coupon page on its site (www.bennigans.com). Instead you can become a "Bennigan's Club Member" by providing your name, e-mail address, ZIP code, birthday, and an optional second date choice, and the company will e-mail you coupons, presumably prior to your birthday, among other times.

Regional Restaurant Resources

If you are undecided as to which type of restaurant you would most enjoy, and especially if you would prefer passing on any of the big-name places, your best bet is to do a search within your neighborhood—or at least within your city or town. Region-specific searches greatly increase your odds of finding more restaurants, because their owners understand that there's little point in advertising nationally if they have only a single location, or just a handful within a limited region.

H.O.T! Coupons (www.hotcoupons.com) allows the site visitor to search by ZIP code. As a test, I searched for deals in my area and received more than 50 listings, more than 40 of which were offering coupons online; several even listed multiple coupons for a single restaurant. While the quantity and variety of locations was impressive, the

classification of the establishments was laughable. The categories were: Deli, Fast Food, Greek Food, Grocery, Ice Cream, Italian Food, Pizza, Restaurants, and "Sandwich Deli Restaurants." Clearly, someone needs to polish their organizational skills.

For readers in the San Diego area, the *San Diego Reader* has a section devoted to restaurant coupons (www.sdreder.com/php/qlist.php?prefix=rest). It displays dozens of restaurants alphabetically, with links to each special deal offered by the establishment. One advantage to searching locally is that you can easily discover eateries you've never even heard of before, because the lists are not limited to the same old mainstream places, most of which end up being fast food.

Not that there's anything wrong *per se* with "quick-service" restaurants. Just make sure that your brand-new laptop does not get cooled accidentally with a fast-melting dollop of vanilla ice cream. □

Michael J. Ross is a computer consultant and freelance writer. He creates Web sites, marketing copy, and press releases that help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable online businesses. He can be reached via his Web site: www.ross.ws. Michael is also the editor of the free newsletter of PristinePlanet.com, which is an outstanding eco-friendly online shopping directory.

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MEMBER 

Specialty Foods on the Web

By Jeff Orloff

Since the early days of mail order, specialty foods have been one of the most popular products sold. The success of mail-order foods came from the ability to enjoy Royal Riviera pears from Harry and David, or cheese and summer sausage from Hickory Farms, in any part of the country. Geographic location was no longer a limiting factor for enjoying hard-to-find treats.

With the increasing availability of the small deep freezer, buying large quantities of foods from companies like Omaha Steaks also gave way to a new style of feeding the family. Bulk buyers could easily store half a side of beef in their garage, complete with a host of side dishes to complement any meal.

The growth of the Internet gave new life to the specialty foods industry. Shoppers no longer have to wait for the latest catalog, or for their salesman to make a visit. Now, a person hungry for unique foods can sit down at their computer and order away.

Having transplanted from Chicago, I missed many of the foods I grew up with. Sure, you can buy hot dogs anywhere, but not Vienna beef dogs. Access to the Internet allows me to order Vienna dogs, pizzas, Italian

beef, and any other childhood memories that I can't find where I live.

Like those of us who are transplanted to other parts of the country, people outside of the bigger cities often find it hard to purchase certain food items. Without a large market to support them, specialty stores often find it hard to sustain a profitable business when selling certain goods. Again, this is where Internet shopping creates a valuable service.

Organic Foods

One of the largest-growing markets in the food industry is organic food. While many grocery chain stores have made an effort to supply their shelves with organic produce and other goods, the stock is generally limited to a few local items that are in season. To find what they are looking for, many shoppers turn to online shops that provide large selections of organically grown foods, ranging from fruits and vegetables to meats, fish, and poultry.

When shopping for organic foods, it is important to ensure that what you are spending your money on is certified organic. Typing "organic foods" into your search engine will yield a large number of results. To make sure you are not taking a risk, you need to

be a smart shopper. Sites such as the Organic Consumer's Association, or OCA (www.organicconsumers.org/purelink.html), act as a clearinghouse of information for consumers to find respected purveyors of organic products. In addition to providing links to credible stores, the OCA provides a wealth of information about local harvests, eco-friendly campaigns, and other "green" products.

Another link farm of organic food stores is provided by Organic Kitchen (www.organickitchen.com). Like the OCA, Organic Kitchen provides a list of online stores that provide consumers all over the United States and Canada with fresh organic foods. Organic Kitchen also provides readers with information about local farms, vineyards, and restaurants that feature organic food. Additionally, the site offers a full information section on the subject of organic gardening.

Wild Game, Specialty Meats, and the Hard-to-Find Morsels

At more than \$50 a pound, not many local butcher shops or grocery stores are carrying Wagyu beef ribeyes. To the discerning chef, there is a need for this and its cousin, Kobe beef. Without access to big suppliers, consumers again can find this elusive—and pricey—delicacy through sites like D'Artagnan (www.dartagnan.com). D'Artagnan was founded in 1985 to provide items like foie gras, pâté, sausages, smoked delicacies, organic game and poultry, and other

(continued on page 24)

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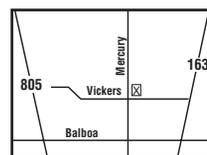
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Specialty

(continued from page 22)

specialty products to hotels, restaurants and the individual consumer.

Thanks to the popularity of food-related TV shows, items like the truffle, a member of the fungi family, are a common household term. At D'Artagnan, truffles, as well as other gourmet mushrooms and sundries, can be purchased.

Having grown up in the city, I was never big into hunting. However, I do find game meats such as venison and buffalo extremely tasty. Since most of us don't have the patience—or skill—to track a wild animal to make for dinner, game meats are served on rare occasions. Seeing a void to fill, ExoticMeats (www.exoticmeats.com) stepped up to the plate and served up a place for the non-hunter to find game meats. Venison, yak, rattlesnake, kangaroo and bear are only some of the meats it offers. For the

more exotic, alligator and crocodile are also on the menu. To round out the product line, ExoticMeats also offers up poultry items and seafood with a range of spices to complement its main product line.

Fruits

As I mentioned, Harry and David made its name by providing unique fruits, like the mammoth Riviera pears, to consumers across the county. To this day, the company's catalog, as well as its Web site, offers the fruits that made Harry and David famous. To capitalize on an idea that proved its worth, other companies have jumped on the bandwagon, selling gourmet fruits and vegetables online.

The Farmers Market Online (www.farmersmarketonline.com) brings the local farmers' market to the digital age. Shoppers can purchase berries, oranges, tomatoes, or any other specialty item from the host of online vendors that collaborate to make the market identical to one you would

find in your neighborhood.

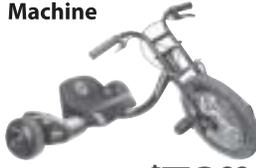
Sites specifically built to sell fruits and vegetables, like Giumarra (www.giumarra.com) and The Fruit Company (www.thefruitcompany.com), follow the method of providing direct-to-market foods to their customers. Visitors to Giumarra can step into Giuseppe Giumarra's vision to find some of the best produce from California to New Zealand.

Likewise, The Fruit Company provides visitors the opportunity to purchase its specialty produce; however this company was originally started to provide Oregon Royal Comice pears to customers. Success with this one fruit has encouraged the company to expand to cherries, apples, citrus, peaches and gift baskets.

* * *

The specialty foods industry is alive and thriving, thanks to the Internet. Next time you find yourself with a hankering for something special or exotic, fire up your Web browser and enjoy! □

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MAC MADNESS!

Secure Your Mac, Part 1: Keeping Your Data Safe

By James Alguire

People often consider computer security primarily the realm of businesses and governments, but it's something every computer user needs to consider. With identity theft on the rise and more people using the Internet and portable computers, it is more important than ever to keep personal data safe.

This three-part series on practicing safe computing with your Mac will get you started. First, let's examine how to keep your data safe.

To Go Forward, You Must Backup

All computer users generate a significant amount of personal data, from photos and purchased music and videos to personal correspondence (as word processing documents), financial records and e-mail. All this information is dutifully stored on the Mac's hard drive, available to the user at any time. But what happens if the computer is stolen, damaged by natural disaster or accident, or the components (like the hard drive) fail and need to be replaced? What is the best way to keep data safe in an emergency?

You guessed it: Back up your data!

Every Mac user should back up their computer data on a regular basis. In fact, several backups should be stored in different locations to further protect against theft, accident or natural disaster. A backup is just a copy of important data for safekeeping. Backups can be as simple as copying files to a flash drive or CD-R/DVD-R, or as complex as creating multiple backup sets that are rotated every week.

Things to consider for a solid backup strategy include how often backups are performed (daily, weekly, or monthly), what data gets backed up (everything or just personal data), to what media backup data is stored (hard drive, CD-R, DVD-R, flash drive, tape drive, etc.), where backups themselves are stored (the attic, safe deposit box, buried in the yard), and whether backups are rotated and/or verified at regular intervals.

Apple's backup program (called Backup) is free to .Mac (www.macos.com) subscribers. (.Mac is Apple's suite of online services.) Backup saves data to a user's iDisk, external hard drives, and removable drives (CD or DVD optical drives, Zip drives, Rev drives and others).

Third-party backup programs to

choose from include the \$129 Retrospect (www.emcinsignia.com); BRULE (www.bru.com), also \$129; Prosoft Engineering's \$59 Data Backup (prosofteng.com); and shareware favorites like the \$40 FolderSynchronizer X (www.softobe.com/products/flsy/pp.html). Also, search for "backup" on VersionTracker (www.versiontracker.com) for additional choices in backup software.

Some backup method pros and cons:

Using .Mac automatically provides an offsite backup, but backing up over the Internet is slow, and Apple provides a maximum of 4GB of storage (the first GB is free, and the rest is an additional charge).

External hard drives make good short-term backups and are fast, but suffer the same problems as all hard drives.

CD-R/DVD-Rs provide good long-term storage, but have limited capacity, and backups are slow.

There are more backup strategies than can be outlined in this article, so check out some backup resources from MacWorld Online (www.macworld.com/2005/02/features/takecontrolexcerpt1/index.php), Infopackets (www.infopackets.com/channels/en/windows/gazette/2005/20050301

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Madness

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_6_key_elements_for_any_backup_strategy.htm), and Free Backup Info (*free-backup.info*).

The important thing is to select a backup strategy that works for you, and stick to it.

There's No Data Like No Data

Another critical way to keep your data safe is by erasing it completely. That sounds strange out of context, but when replacing smaller hard drives with larger hard drives, or retiring older Macs (by selling or donating), personal data shouldn't be left behind for new owners to discover. Just throwing old personal data in the trash and deleting it, thinking that it is safely destroyed, is not enough.

File and hard drive data-recovery programs can restore quite a bit of deleted data, even from drives that

have been reformatted. Mac OS X has a secure file-deletion feature called Secure Empty Trash, which writes meaningless data over the files, preventing them from being recovered. Secure Empty Trash takes much longer to complete than the regular Empty Trash

To go beyond just erasing files, Apple's Disk Utility provides options for ensuring that personal data can't be recovered when erasing the entire hard drive. Simply boot from a secondary drive (optical drive or external hard drive), the installation disc that came with the Mac, or a Mac OS X install disc, and run Apple's Disk Utility. Select the drive or volume to be erased, click on the Erase Tab, and click on the Security Options button. The four options are: Don't Erase Data (erasing the hard drive's directory structure, but leaving the data alone; the data is still there but can't be accessed), Zero Out Data (writes zeros over all the data on the hard drive, preventing its easy recovery),

7-Pass Erase (writes random data over the entire drive seven times for more secure data erasure), and 35-Pass Erase (same as 7-Pass, only the job is done 35 times).

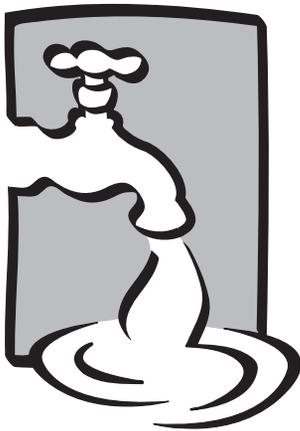
The 7-Pass and 35-Pass Erase take significantly more time to complete than the other options, so be prepared to go out for coffee once the process begins. After the data is erased, simply reinstall the Mac OS or restore the system from the restore discs that came with the Mac to return it to its factory-fresh condition. The hard drive or Mac can now be safely recycled.

* * *

Practicing safe computing means knowing when to keep your data safe by copying or erasing it. Next week, we'll discuss how to secure a wireless network. □

James Alguire is a writer, Apple Certified Mac consultant, and trainer. For answers, send an e-mail to jalguire@inkdrop.com.

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Worldwide & Product news reviews

By Charles Carr

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What That HDTV

Salesperson Might Not Tell You

Marken Communications' Andy Marken has a lot to say about the current state of HDTV: "Well, the World Cup didn't produce a flood of sales, as we thought. If it weren't for the infamous 'head butt,' retailers and manufacturers would have sworn the games had been cancelled. What went wrong? What needs to be done?"

"In the United States, it is estimated that less than 10 percent of households will have HDTV by the end of the year. Put another way, most TV set owners find the quality of content they are viewing is good enough. In fact, when they pull the plug on analog TV on February 17, 2009, it is estimated that 20-plus percent of households still won't have HDTV sets."

Marken believes one of the problems is that people have so many video choices today. "We've got mobile video (increasingly, 3G), IPTV, video iPod, PSP, Smartphone, digital TV, POT (plain-old TV), and PC/broadband. While the Consumer Electronics Association has finally launched a consumer-education program for HDTV, most people don't really understand what they're talking about when big-box clerks go into their HDTV song and dance, using terms like 'superbly sharp, clean, crisp viewing enjoyment.' Compared to what?"

"What the HDTV set and home-entertainment network folks won't tell you is that the beautiful video entertainment vision is still a cloudy dream. Much of it is still outside of their control, no matter what they do to deliver devices and solutions."

Marken worries that your Digital Video Recorder's ability to time shift may not be available in the future. "That's still up for grabs, but Telly-

wood is pushing hard to take that off your wish list." Nor does he think [that the ability to] move content to your Smartphone or portable device is a sure thing.

When you do decide to buy that big-screen TV, he recommends you also pick up an HDTV tuner or get an HDTV card for your PC. "They're less expensive, and the network/local stuff is still beamed to you through the air."

Regarding high-def movie availability, Marken opines, "Give Tollywood a year or two to work out the post-production kinks, because most of the stuff right now is not well-reprocessed high-def. It will take them at least [that long] to take advantage of all of the post-production tools they have."

Marken predicts that, since we didn't buy HDTVs like we were supposed to for the World Cup, for this coming holiday season, the price for high-quality plasma and LCD sets will come down to what he calls "extremely reasonable."

Google's Lateral Click Fraud Solution

Because of something called click fraud, Google's \$6 billion-a-year AdSense advertising arm may be at risk.

There are two kinds of click fraud: network click fraud, where business owners click ads on their own Web sites to boost revenue paid to them by AdSense; and the kind where a business owner clicks on a competitor's ads anywhere on the Web, forcing him or her to pay Google more.

Google's solution is to implement "cost-per-action" ads, where advertisers don't actually pay until an interaction takes place—something gets bought, a form gets filled out, a survey is taken, etc. This model

Product Ratings

- ⊕ Don't say we didn't warn you.
- ⊕⊕ What is that store's return policy?
- ⊕⊕⊕ We've seen better; we've seen worse.
- ⊕⊕⊕⊕ You'll probably be happy you did.
- ⊕⊕⊕⊕⊕ What are you waiting for?

would make Google an actual partner in the final sale and, as a result (the company hopes), make click fraud an irrelevant term.

Goal Oriented

Sony's \$40 World Tour Soccer '06 (www.us.playstation.com/Content/OGS/UCUS-98613/Site), rated "E" for Everyone and currently available exclusively for the PlayStation Portable (PSP) system, offers thrilling gameplay that enables you to take on the best players from every continent.

The game features 10 all-new point-based challenges that emphasize the fundamentals of the game, like passing, ball control, possession and style of play. Players advance through challenges with a standard ladder-type system.

Exhibition mode features 69 national teams, eight stadiums, and more than 1,000 players from around the globe. In Ad Hoc mode, as many as four players can hook up using the PSP's built-in wireless. There's also a pretty cool game-sharing feature that allows players to share the game wirelessly with other PSPs using only one copy of the game. Unfortunately, it's only a demo version, not the complete game.

I really liked this game. It's easy to just grab your PSP and get a game going. The multiplayer modes, including Online mode, are excellent. It would be even better if the game included club teams, improved graphics quality a bit more, and shortened load times. ⊕⊕⊕⊕

Review contributed by
Kyle Linnerman

Calendar of Events

Monday, August 28

■ **Computer Maintenance**—Part 1 of a six-week course offered by Foothills Adult Education Center. Learn how to install software, upgrade software you already have, and clear viruses from your system. Learn maintenance techniques like disk defragmentation and scandisk. Good working knowledge of Windows is highly recommended. Choose Monday mornings (8:30 to 11:40 a.m.), or Wednesday evenings (6 to 9:10 p.m.). Classes are held at 1550 Melody Lane in El Cajon. Cost for each class is \$30. For more information, call Pam Howard at 619-401-4122.

■ **Introduction to Computers**—Part 1 of a 16-week class offered by Foothills Adult Education Center. Learn about the use of the mouse and keyboard, basic word processing, and much more. The class is offered Mondays from 8:30 to 11:40 a.m., Wednesdays from 6 to 9:10 p.m., and Thursdays from 8:30 to 11:40 a.m. Classes are held at 1550 Melody Lane in El Cajon. Cost for each class is \$35. Call Pam Howard at 619-401-4122.

■ **Network+ Certification Training**—This five-week class meets Mondays and Wednesdays from 6 to 10 p.m. or choose to attend Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. To register, call 760-871-3100. Visit www.cesdtraining.com for other schedules.

Tuesday, August 29

■ **Excel**—Part 1 of a 16-week class offered by Foothills Adult Education Center. Learn the fundamentals, such as creating, editing, and saving spreadsheets, as well as how to create formulas, charts, and apply spreadsheet functions. The class is offered Tuesdays from noon to 3:10 p.m. (all levels), and Thursdays from 6 to 9:10 p.m. (beginners). Classes are held at 1550 Melody Lane in El Cajon. Cost is \$35. For more Call Pam Howard at 619-401-4122.

■ **Digital Movie Making I**—A five-week course offered by Foothills Adult Education Center. Convert and edit your old VHS home movies. Then transfer them into digital works. Hands-on filming and editing methods for beginners and intermediate movie makers! The class run Tuesdays from 6 to 9:10 p.m. at 1550 Melody Lane in El Cajon. Cost is \$30. For more information, call 619-401-4122.

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Saturday, September 9

■ **MCSA/MCSE 2003 with Security+ Certification Training**—This class runs two weekends in a row per module, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. To register, call 760-871-3100 or visit www.cesdtraining.com.

■ **Cisco CCNA Certification Bootcamp**—This class meets two weekends in a row, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Seats are limited to assure multiple router/switches per student. To register, call 760-871-3100 or visit www.cesdtraining.com.

Monday–Wednesday, September 25–27

■ **CDIA—Certified Documents Imaging Architect Certification**—This class runs Monday through Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. To register, call 760-871-3100.

Monday, October 2

■ **Learn to Create a Web Site In One Day**—A course offered by MiraCosta College. The class will cover HTML basics, two different methods for creating Web pages, how to select a host and domain name, the basic site planning strategies and Web design principles, and how to upload your site onto the World Wide Web. The class runs from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in Room 112 at MiraCosta's San Elijo Campus, 333 Manchester Avenue in Cardiff. Cost is \$89. For more information or to register, call 760-795-6820 or visit www.miracosta.edu/commsvcs.

Monday, October 9

■ **Learn to Be Computer Literate In Just Two Days**—A course offered by MiraCosta College. The class will focus on the key concepts to becoming a successful computer user. The class runs from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in Room 112 at MiraCosta's San Elijo Campus, 333 Manchester Avenue in Cardiff. Cost is \$160. For more information or to register, call 760-795-6820 or visit www.miracosta.edu/commsvcs.

Free events of a non-commercial nature will be listed in Calendar free of charge as space allows. Commercial events can be advertised in Calendar at a rate of \$25 for 25 words or less, with each additional word costing \$1. Anything separated by a space is considered one word.

In either case, type or legibly print your listing, including the date and time of your event, its location, and the name and phone number of a contact person. Calendar deadline is 4:30 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication date. Listings will not be taken over the phone.

All commercial Calendar listings must be paid in advance by check or money order. Enclose listing with payment, if applicable, and mail to Calendar of Events, c/o *ComputerEdge*, P.O. Box 83086, San Diego, CA 92138.

Hot On The Web

Still More on MySpace

By Jim Trageser

Just how far the MySpace (www.myspace.com) phenomenon has extended into real life was made clear during a recent concert I attended. It was at Michael Tiernan's New Acoustic Generation (NAG) show at the Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach in late July.

A few weeks earlier, while preparing to write an article for the North County Times on competitive turntablism (yes, it really exists, and, yes, that makes me feel really old), I'd been looking for a local music photographer who might have had photos of turntablism events we could run with the story. (Turntablism is the art of using a turntable to "scratch" like the early rappers.)

After thinking it over a bit, I e-mailed someone I'd "met" via MySpace when she added me as a friend after finding my profile linked off a local musician's MySpace page. Debra is incredibly plugged into San Diego's acoustic music scene and referred me to three different San Diego-area photographers who specialize in shooting live music events.

Unfortunately, none of them specialize in turntablism, and so I'm still looking for photos.

But at the NAG show, I saw a guy with a camera up near the stage who looked mighty familiar—and indeed, it was one of the photographers from MySpace! As soon as I approached him, his face lit up—my MySpace account has several pictures of me, as well—and we shook hands and introduced ourselves, real-world style.

Throughout the evening, that pattern repeated itself—and not just with

me. The photographer was sitting with another of my MySpace friends, a local singer/songwriter. It was my first time meeting her in person, of course—and then, as some of her other, real-world friends would come by to say hi, she'd introduce me to them by saying, "And you're both on my MySpace friends list." Voilá! A way to follow up with these other local music fans and musicians.

It is a remarkable transformation in how we network. I'm sure it was old hat by now for MySpace veterans, but it was an eye-opener for me.

And I'm sure it would have horrified any teenager watching this—to see so many people in their 30s, 40s, and even older exchanging their MySpace account names!

Completing the circle, I was mostly at the NAG show to see the Steph Johnson Band, whose debut CD I had recently reviewed (and loved—do yourself a favor and go buy it now! She sings like Sade, and her band cooks like Steely Dan!). And, yes, I'd first come across the Steph Johnson Band while doing ZIP code searches of San Diego bands on MySpace.

In fact, every band playing at the NAG show that night I already knew from MySpace: Michael Tiernan and Barbara Nesbitt and Kyle Phelan and Dylan Donkin and Steph Johnson. Even with the ones I hadn't heard before, I kinda knew their music already from listening to the four songs they can have as MP3 downloads. I knew who was who by their MySpace photos.

But bands promoting themselves online is no longer unusual.

Everyone in the audience network-

ing via a single Web site? Now that's new.

Still

Despite MySpace's tremendous success and status as one of the top destinations on the Web, it apparently still has not decentralized its servers!

The morning after the above show, I wanted to touch base with MySpace friends I'd finally met in person, as well as add MySpace friends I'd run into at the club.

It was down.

Again.

Rolling blackouts in Los Angeles due to the heat wave took down MySpace yet again.

It's not bad enough that half the time you try to do anything on MySpace in the afternoon you get a message saying, "Server is too busy." (And just try to listen to a band's music on MySpace in the afternoon during the school year—once the kids get out of school and get online, MySpace slows to a crawl.)

MySpace has captured all kinds of lucrative demographics: teens, tweens, young men 18–32, even middle-aged farts like me. There are ads all over the site, and I'm sure advertisers—including most of the movie studios and record labels—are paying top dollar to get their ads in front of all those eyeballs.

So, spend some of that money on beefing up the infrastructure already! I realize corporate owner Rupert Murdoch has a reputation as a cheap SOB, but if the folks at MySpace don't beef up the site's capacity and become more reliable, someone else with more business sense is going to take the business model MySpace has proven and do it a whole lot better. □

Jim Trageser can be reached via his Web site: www.trageser.com.

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5	9	3						4
4				5	9	1		
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	5	9	2					
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	6				7	2		

Sudoku 8-25-06

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CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Do It Now

By Douglas E. Welch

Does your company provide you with a 401k plan, tuition reimbursement, free classes or any other perks? Are you taking advantage of it? Why not? The truth is, these perks could disappear tomorrow for any number of reasons. You need to make a move, now, to take full advantage of everything your company offers—otherwise, you miss out!

Despite the fact that many companies offer some form of reimbursement for continuing education, it is often one of the least-used perks. Sure, it takes time and commitment to return to the classroom, but if your company is willing to assist you, why *wouldn't* you do it? The truth is, many workers get trapped in thoughts of, "I'm too busy." Too busy to take classes, to do homework, to do anything but their job. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy, though. There is a very good chance that if they took some classes, they might just find the tools necessary to do better in their job or move up in their department. Instead, they ignore the opportunity, and life goes on as always.

While I am not necessarily a big fan of technical certifications, they become extremely attractive if someone else is paying for them. While they can help you in your current job, they also represent skills that you can take to any future job. These are the stepping stones that can allow you to move up in your current department or start the next phase of your career with another company. Instead of spending thousands of dollars of your own money, take advantage of any assistance you can find. Your company will benefit from your new skills, and you will make yourself more marketable for the future.

In the past, I have been able to use company benefits to work one-on-one with well-known professional artists,

have lunch with some of the world's foremost animators, and prepare for my retirement. The opportunities are there waiting for you. Who knows when you might find yourself on the next layoff list, or when you might like to apply for that new opening? You need to be ready for whatever comes your way. You need to do it today, regardless of the hurdles you think you face. If you don't, I can guarantee that you will be kicking yourself afterwards. I see it happen to workers repeatedly.

Be Prepared

In a related issue, make sure that you are prepared to take advantage of any work-related opportunities that might come your way. You can never be sure what will happen tomorrow, let alone next year. The examples are nearly endless. I had a close friend miss a working trip to Paris, simply because he had never taken the time to get a passport. He had to sit there and watch another coworker with less experience go instead. You can bet he got a passport soon afterward, but even so, that opportunity was lost.

A friend of a friend is currently struggling because she didn't complete certain certifications for her work as a nutritionist. She had some major family issues that required a move back to her hometown. Unfortunately, without these certifications, her job choices are now more limited at a time when she is also struggling to put her life back in order. Again, life can blindside you with crises and changes. Being prepared today can go a long way toward softening the impact of tomorrow.

Finally, as I grow older myself, I see more and more of my peers struggling to develop a retirement plan. It is not that we intend to retire any time soon, but many of us were lax in beginning our retirement savings. I know that I missed out on two years of 401k matching funds simply because I didn't take the time to fill out the paperwork. I know it can be difficult to contemplate such things when you are in your 20s, but this is exactly when you need to do it.

From your first day of work until your last, you need to explore and take advantage of every opportunity you are given at your company. Don't let today's "busyness" prevent you from getting that new certification, or even a new college degree. You don't have to do it all right now. You need to do whatever you can manage. Before you know it, opportunities can vanish, leaving you only with regrets. □

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