



December 2008

Lake County Area Computer Enthusiasts

Volume 25, Issue 9



Shop Wisely

Computer Buying Tips

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Recently, I received a stimulus check from the good people at the IRS. Rather than selfishly stashing the cash away for a rainy day, I went shopping for a laptop to replace my aging desktop system—for the good of the economy, of course. I didn't have a specific model in mind when I began shopping, so I did a lot of looking and comparing, considering, and reconsidering. I'll share some thoughts on the process that might come in handy if you decide to help jump-start the market with a PC purchase.

Budget Sense

A wise person once told me that when deciding on what sort of specs you need in a computer, you should first decide on a budget and then get as much of and the best of everything that you can afford, and that's exactly what I tried to do. It's really that simple. Of course, if you'll only ever use your computer to check your email, you shouldn't buy a \$2,000 machine simply because that's how much you have socked away. But chances are good that you'll always need more RAM, more processing power, and a bigger hard drive. Getting the best I could (rather than the minimum that I currently need) means I'll be able to keep up with the requirements of new applications longer. Also, it's always a good idea to look for a computer with significant upgrade potential so you'll be able to use the same machine well into

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Board of Directors 2008-2009

| Robin Seidenberg President president@lcace.org | |
|---|---|
| Mike McEnery Vice President vicepresident@lcace.org | |
| Terri Hanlon | 7 |
| Winnie Frost | • |
| Mike McEnery | } |
| Linda Busch |) |
| Lester Larkin Public Relations pr@lcace.org | • |

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Permission is granted to reproduce any or all parts of this newsletter in other User Group publications, provided that credit is given to LCACE and the individual author (s).

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Lake County Area Computer Enthusiasts LCACE c/o Group Ambassador

Mr. J.J. Johnson

Membership

Membership in LCACE is open to all individuals and families interested in personal computing. Annual dues are \$20.00 per individual/family. Associate membership is only \$10.00 (out of state, unable to attend meetings). Membership includes a one year subscription to the LCACE News Journal and access to all club libraries and functions. Applications for membership may be obtained at the monthly meeting, by request on the club Hotline, and are now available on our WEB site at - http://www.lcace.org.

Meetings

LCACE meetings are usually held on Saturdays at the Grayslake Area Public Library, 100 Library Lane, Grayslake, Illinois. The meeting room opens at noon and the formal meeting begins at 12:30 p.m. All meetings are open to the public. Bring a friend!

Advertising

Ad rates per issue: Full page - \$25, Half page - \$15, Quarter page - \$10, Business Card - \$5. Discounts are available on advance purchase of multiple issues. Please send camera-ready copy and payment to the club address by the 21st of the month preceding publication. For more information on ad pricing, please call our Hotline. Ads are FREE to all paid members.

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<u>News Journal Editor</u>—Mike McEnery can be contacted for information about advertisements and editorials at: vicepresident@lcace.org

AND THE WINNER IS



Congratulations to Dorothy Sutherland for winning the November 50/50 raffle.

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(Continued from page 1) the future.

There are some extras most of us can forgo. Take, for instance, a Blu-ray Disc drive. It would be nice to watch the latest releases in all their HD (high-definition) glory, but it's just not affordable yet. Adding a BD drive to a laptop these days will add about \$200 to your bottom line. I'd rather have a more powerful computer and watch slightly less-spectacular movies while I wait for prices to drop. Other things I avoided include that significantly discounted printer that online retailers try to throw in. (I'd prefer to choose a more expensive, better-quality model than purchase a lower-end printer that might cost me a lot more in ink refills.)

Don't leave out essentials such as a surge protector and the all-important antivirus. Do it on your own terms, though. You aren't limited to the software or hardware that retailers offer to bundle with your new computer. Sometimes it's preferable to shop for these items separately. Also, note that the majority of new machines won't come with a full-fledged productivity suite. Work the cost of such software into your budget. If there's little wiggle room in your budget, don't rule out open-source software. Suites such as OpenOffice.org (www.openoffice.org) offer a viable alternative to high-priced productivity software.

Settle In

The first thing I did (after fiddling with the fun new features on my laptop) was make myself comfortable. This meant downloading Firefox, iTunes, and other familiar apps and transferring my photos and other important data to my new, more trustworthy hard drive. (For a comprehensive guide to migrating data and applications to a new PC, see "DIY Project: It's Moving Time" in the March 2008 issue of Smart Computing.)

If comfort for you means settling into the familiar grooves of Windows XP, note that many manufacturers still sell new computers with the older OS (operating system). Support for WinXP will eventually fade, but Microsoft recently announced it would back the OS until 2014. Even so, you'll likely eventually have to switch to Windows Vista (nagging alerts and all); now might be the time to bite the bullet.

For me, the laptop-finding journey ended when I found a good deal on an HP Pavilion dv6910us (\$729.99; www.hp.com) from a local retailer. It fit my budget and fulfilled more than my basic computing needs, and it offered some extras such as Bluetooth and a built-in Web cam. Here's hoping your PC hunt will be similarly successful.

by Tara Simmons

Online Mail Services

Online Mail Services Buy & Print Postage From A PC

"Reprinted with permission from *Smart Computing*. Visit <u>www.SmartComputing.com/Groups</u> to learn what *Smart Computing* can do for you and your user group!"

The postman's creed about putting on a brave face where rain, sleet, or snow is concerned is the stuff of



legends. That doesn't mean the rest of us are expected to live up to the same standard where matters of the U.S. Postal Service are concerned. In fact, it's possible today to avoid the outdoors

entirely and still purchase postage. With an Internet connection, software, and standard desktop printer, you can do anything from buy postage for a letter to print authorized shipping labels for packages to clients of your home office-based business. Further, you can insure those packages at discounted rates, track packages, and more—all from your home day or night.

We'll explore the advantages of doing postagerelated business online, both through services the U.S. Postal Service offers and services that approved, third-party vendors operate based on the USPS' PC Postage technology. We'll also detail special equipment available for handling more extensive postal tasks and features that go beyond simply buying stamps.

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Robin's RAMblings

On Saturday, November 8th, LCACE and the Grayslake Area Public Library co-sponsored Sue Walters' program, "Computerized Embroidery". Dorothy Sutherland won the 50-50 prize. Former member Patricia Ortseifen of Lake Forest rejoined LCACE. Welcome back, Pat!

Our holiday party will be at the University of Illinois Extension Building on U.S. 45 between Route 120 and Center Street, Saturday,

December 6th. Everyone always enjoys our party. LCACE has some great cooks. Bring a healthy dish to pass. The club will provide ham. rolls.



L.C.A.C.E Holiday Party 2004

condiments, pop, cake, and ice cream. As always, family and friends are welcome to attend.

I hope you're all busily selling tickets for our holiday raffle: first prize is a **17**" Compaq laptop with **3GB** of RAM, 200GB hard drive, built in **webcam** and microphone, etc.; second prize is an 8 megapixel Nikon L18 digital camera with 3X optical zoom and a 3" LCD screen; third prize is a Maxtor 320GB One touch 4 mini external hard drive. Tickets are \$1 each or 6 or \$5. You can't win unless you buy tickets!

Our January 10th meeting will be devoted to "Ask the Gurus" and "Show and Tell". Bring your new "toys" to share with other members. Stephanie Ellington of *Smart Computing Magazine* will be our speaker on February 7th. We will divide into two special interest groups on March 14th: J.J. Johnson will lead the digital photography group; Mike McEnery will discuss *Quicken Starter Edition*. Our April 4th meeting will include elections, our club birthday party, "Show and Tell" and "Ask the Gurus".

Bart Berndtson, a guest who attended our last meeting, gave me a time-saving keyboard shortcut. When typing a URL, if you enter "CNN", and then hit *control* and *enter*, it will automatically become http://www.cnn.com/. Thanks for the neat tip, Brad!

I know many of us are belt-tightening this year, but if you are considering a new digital camera for yourself or as a gift, you may want to look at Buy.com's holiday digital camera buying guide: http://www.buy.com/retail/holidayGuide.asp?loc=66332&adid=17654&dcaid=17654. If you're thinking of purchasing a laptop, Buy.com's holiday laptop buying guide is helpful: http://www.buy.com/retail/holidayGuide.asp?
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Have you read reviews of *Windows 7*, the next Windows operating system (that is supposed to fix all the problems in *Vista*)? Early reviews seem to be mixed, with the consensus that the changes from *Vista* in the pre-beta version are not great. It should be interesting to see how and when the final product emerges.

Best wishes to everyone for a happy holiday season, and a happy, HEALTHY new year!

Robin

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Postage Paid, Web-Style

Three years of research and testing went into PC Postage, a trademarked technology the USPS launched in 1999. Since then, PC Postage has proven a godsend for consumers and small-business owners who can't afford standing in lines at the post office or spending time manually addressing packages. At its simplest, PC Postage services involve consumers using software to manage postage needs. Postage is typically printable using special label printers or standard laser or inkjet desktop printers and contains indicia, or digital markings, that resemble a barcode that's printed directly to envelopes, shipping labels, or customized labels consumers can create.



Although you can use a standard inkjet or laser printer to print postage and shipping labels, special printers, such as DYMO's Label-Writer 400, are also available.

Third-party vendors that have been approved to offer PC Postage services, including selling

postage from their own Web sites, must first meet governmental requirements related to security and finances. Third-party vendors tout the ability to save customers time as well as offering features aimed at managing postal tasks, including everything from accessing online address books to tracking postage purchases over time.

The first companies granted PC Postage approval were Stamps.com and E-Stamp in 1999. (In 2001, Stamps.com purchased E-Stamp's trademarks and patents.) In the first year after PC Postage's launch, more than 200,000 people reportedly registered for online postal services. Additionally, small- or home offices spent an estimated \$8 million during PC Postage's initial months. In 2002, the USPS began selling postage and other services online through its own portal called Click-N-Ship (sss-web.usps.com/cns/landing.do). Besides Stamps.com and Click-N-Ship, other PC Postage-approved companies operating today include Endicia.com, Pitney Bowes (www.pb.com), and eBay.

On eBay, users can use PayPal accounts to buy shipping labels that they can print from home. Unlike other online postage services, eBay doesn't charge additional fees or monthly subscription plans to buy shipping labels. Users can buy up to \$500 insurance with delivery confirmation included for domestic First -Class Mail Parcels, Express Mail, Media Mail, Priority Mail, Priority Mail Flat Rate Box, and Parcel Post Mail. Additionally, users can print Express Mail International and Priority Mail International labels and fill out customs forms online. Further, a Carrier Pickup feature can arrange for a USPS carrier to pick up packages without added charges.

While Click-N-Ship offers similar services, Stamps.com and Endicia.com offer even more features to consumers and small-business owners who have more extensive mailing needs. The following is a glimpse at each service.

Click-N-Ship. After registering for a free account at Click-N-Ship, you can store up to three credit card numbers at the Web site to expedite checkouts, access a personal Address Book online with up to 3,000 addresses, file online domestic insurance claims, view six months' worth of shipping history, print up to 10 shipping labels at once, use an automated Ship Notification email for recipients, and use SCAN (Shipment Confirmation Acceptance Notice) forms. Click-N-Ship also offers a 3% discount off the retail price for domestic Express Mail and up to 11% off for domestic Priority Mail.

To print shipping labels, you can use standard 8.5- x 11-inch white paper and use home or postage scales, which the USPS sells online, along with self-adhesive shipping labels and other postal supplies. Using Click-N-Ship requires running Windows 98 or above or Mac OS 10.x or above. Additionally, you need a laser or high-quality inkjet printer, as thermal printers aren't supported. The site's free USPS Shipping Assistant (tinyurl.com/y2ybun), meanwhile, provides software aimed at businesses to create and print domestic and international shipping labels, calculate postage prices and delivery times, verify sent and delivery information, arrange carrier pickup services, and more.

Stamps.com was one of the first two companies approved by the USPS to sell online postage and other postal services in 1999.

Endicia.com. Using Endicia.com involves signing up for a monthly plan which includes Standard (\$9.95 per month), Premium (\$15.95 per month), and Professional (\$34.95 per month). It also offers a Starter Kit that bundles 12 months Standard/seven months

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Premium/four months Professional service with a DYMO LabelWriter 400 printer (\$119.95 value), USB -based 10-pound Pelouze scale (\$79.95 value), and nearly \$30 of DYMO-based printer labels for \$249.95.

Features in the Standard plan include calculating and printing exact postage; delivery and signature confirmation options; up to 52% savings on insurance; online management of expenses and transactions: email notifications: customized postage op-PictureItPostage tions through (www.pictureitpostage.com) using photos, logos, etc.; address book integration with Microsoft Outlook: and more. The service's Premium plan adds options for Stealth Postage (which hides shipping and handling info), return shipping labels, and business reply mail. The Professional plan adds Bulk Acceptance Scans, which provides proof that the USPS has picked up packages.



Stamps.com was one of the first two companies approved by the USPS to sell online postage and other postal services in 1999.

Endicia.com also powers DYMO's free Stamps service that DYMO includes with its LabelWriter 400 Turbo (\$139.99). Twin Turbo (\$189.99; prints both labels and digital stamps), and Duo (\$209.99) printers for outputting First Class, Priority, Express Mail Flat Rate Envelope, International, and postcard postage. Endicia.com supports any Windows PC, but an Endicia for Mac plan (\$15.95 per month) is also available. Be-

yond the DYMO printer bundles, Endicia.com also sells a Zebra (www.zebra.com) printer bundle (\$474.95; Zebra LP2844 label printer included), labels, scales, postage rolls and sheets, various management software, and certified forms.

Stamps.com. Citing more than 400,000 registered users and \$1 billion in postage printed to date, Stamps.com operates on a flat \$17.99 a month fee for home users. For small business and enterprise users there are the Premier (\$24.99) and Enterprise (\$39.99 per location) plans. You can cancel a subscription at any time, and Stamps.com also offers a four-week trial (a credit card is required to register). The trial period includes a package valued at \$80 that gives you \$25 in postage, a 5-pound digital scale, \$5 in supplies, and coupons worth \$20 in postage redeemable following the trial. After

downloading Stamps.com's free software, you can do everything at the site from print postage directly to envelopes with delivery and return addresses verified through the USPS Address Matching System to print shipping labels to 8.5- x 11-inch white paper or self-adhesive labels.

Endicia.com's online postal features include PictureltPostage, which lets you create stamps using your own photos and other graphics.

Stamps.com's NetStamps service, meanwhile, is designed to be a postal stamp alternative for buyers by offering five-, 50-, and 250-sheet packs good for domestic and international mail. Other Stamps.com features include free delivery confirmation on Priority Mail: 21% off on select FedEx service rates for Premier users: a 3% discount on Express Mail: 1 to 11% discounts on Priority Mail; a 6% discount on Priority Mail International: 8% discount on Express Mail International rates; and 10% discount on insuring packages. Additionally, Stamps.com offers support for printing Certified Mail and Return Receipt forms, email notifications to recipients, automated records of postage printed, one-click tracking, and the ability to print sheets of customized stamps via the service's PhotoStamps (photo.stamps.com) store using your own photos, company logs, and other graphical features.

Stamps.com only supports systems running Windows 98 or newer, meaning Mac users must have an Intel-based system with Windows installed or use Windows-emulation software. Integrated support is in place for importing addresses from versions of Outlook, Outlook Express, Lotus Organizer and Notes, and other clients. Additionally, support for direct integration into versions of Word, Office, Lotus Word Pro, Corel WordPerfect, and Microsoft Works is also supported. A higher-tier Enterprise plan, meanwhile, gives companies with networked offices support for multiple users to use one account.

It's In The Mail

Choosing which online postage service to use depends on your shipping needs. If you own a small-or home office business, for example, the options at services such as Stamps.com and Endicia.com are definitely worth exploring. If you consistently send packages through eBay, that site's service is likely more convenient. If you want to avoid monthly fees, the USPS' Click-N-Ship offers the basics and more.

by Blaine Flamig

Another great meeting

After the business meeting, which Robin conducted with her usual display of leadership and efficiency, we were treated to a demonstration of <u>computer driven embroidery</u>. Is there anything you can't do with a computer? Susan Walters showed us how it's done. The crowd around Susan and her exotic sewing machine afterwards showed how interested we were. She did a great job.

Winnie Frost treated us to delicious coffee on a cold day.

Les Larkin



Susan Walters' Embroidery Demo



Embroidery Machine At Work



Post Demo Questions



Holiday Raffle 2008

1st Prize:

Compaq Presario Notebook Computer

- 17.0" WXGA BrightView Widescreen
- 3072 MB DDR2 SDRAM
- 200GB (5400 RPM) hard drive
- Intel Pentium Dual-Core processor T2390
- Built-in webcam with integrated microphone
- LightScribe Super Multi 8X DVD±R/RW with Double Layer Support
- Windows Vista Home Premium-Service Pack 1



2nd Prize:

Nikon Coolpix L18 8MP Digital Camera

- 3X Optical Zoom
- 3" LCD screen





3rd Prize:

Maxtor OneTouch 4 Mini 320GB

Portable Hard Drive

• 5400 RPM, up to 8MB cache buffer

4th Prize:

1-Year's Membership LCACE "Members Helping Members"



Tickets: 6 for \$5 or \$1 each

Drawing December 6, 2008

Winner need not be present

If you need raffle tickets to sell,

contact Mike McEnery at vp@lcace.org (847) 872-1314

Join Us For Our Annual Holiday Party December 6, 2008 11:00 am to 3:00 pm

University of Illinois Auditorium (Annex) 100 Rte. 45 (Grayslake Fairgrounds) (Rt. 45 & Rt. 120) Grayslake, Illinois Door Prizes Software, hardware, and cash. Movies - Games - Fun Food-Food-Food **POT LUCK**

We provide the soft drinks and ice cream.

All you have to bring is a delicious dish to share.

e-mail

| Alleman Flizabeth S | esa2204@aol.com | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| | jande77893@aol.com | | | | |
| | luludefl@yahoo.com | | | | |
| | jgiftofgrace@yahoo.com | | | | |
| | lindashrub@juno.com | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Cirveilo, waiter | waltc1@msn.com | | | | |
| | eddiegothann@hotmail.com | | | | |
| | Jfrost13@sbcglobal.net | | | | |
| | wfrost13@sbcglobal.net | | | | |
| | zgilbertsen@vzw.blackberry.net | | | | |
| | cgroth2@juno.com | | | | |
| | villesuzie@warpnet.net | | | | |
| Guthman, Carolyn A | carolyng5@aol.com | | | | |
| Halley, Jack W | jack96@aol.com | | | | |
| | terhanlon@comcast.com | | | | |
| Hobson, Marshia Y | omsgadget@yahoo.com | | | | |
| Kalinoski, Donna L | donnaleek@juno.com | | | | |
| | jktkroy@comcast.net | | | | |
| Kostelnik, Steve | steve_kostelnik@usa.net | | | | |
| | scott.krause@neostudios.com | | | | |
| Lagoni, Doreen J | bearmagis1899@aol.com | | | | |
| Larkin, Lester | LesLarkin@Netscape.net | | | | |
| Martin, Donald | dmartin339@comcast.net | | | | |
| Martin, James K | jimmy@jimmywireless.com | | | | |
| McDonald, Kathleen | clbavp@aol.com | | | | |
| | markym36@aol.com | | | | |
| | mmcenery@sbcglobal.net | | | | |
| | uncleroy@iwie.net | | | | |
| Rivera, Julio & Lourdes | jlrivera@db3broadband.com | | | | |
| | anna-ross-rogers@us.ing.com | | | | |
| | jrutnet@aol.com | | | | |
| | dasadler@comcast.net | | | | |
| | leslie164@juno.com | | | | |
| | patys@theramp.net | | | | |
| | drlew1@aol.com | | | | |
| Seidenberg Robin | anguslechat@aol.com | | | | |
| | sditto@eww | | | | |
| Straw Gerald | gkstraw@comcast.net | | | | |
| | urhgeorge@aol.com | | | | |
| | g.vogt@sbcglobal.net | | | | |
| | luludefl@yahoo.com | | | | |
| | dcwilson@exexpc.com | | | | |
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| If you do not see your name, something is miss- | | | | | |
| spelled or wrong, ple | spelled or wrong, please let Mike McEnery | | | | |

As much as we try, we do make errors. Please advise us if there is a mistake in your e-mail address or if it is not included in this listing. Send e-mail to Ms. Linda Busch at membership@lcace.org with your additions and/or corrections. Thank you. This listing last updated Sept. 23, 2006.

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LCACE HOTLINE

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members



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LCACE

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Power Point XP
Digital Photography - The Easy Way



Take a good look, you just might see

LCACE **CLUB PICTURES** at: http://lcace.org/PhotoAlbums.htm

TIME TO RENEW

All memberships will now be renewable annually on April 1st. This change in the payment of annual dues will allow the treasurer to budget our money more closely. If you haven't already renewed your membership, see Linda or Winnie to find out your pro-rated amount.

Serving Lake County, Illinois



Visit us @ http://www.lcace.org

NEXT MEETING
January 10, 2009
Grayslake Area Public Library
@ 12:30 pm.



Round table/Ask the Gurus & Show and Tell

Lake County Area Computer Enthusiasts 409 S. Elmwood Ave. Waukegan, IL 60085

POSTAGE REQUIRED