

Technology Corner

by: George Champine

New Technology 1

The good news: the industry has now standardized on one kind of media chip for digital cameras, replacing five previous types such as Compact Flash, multimedia, xD, etc. It is called Secure Digital, abbreviated "SD". These chips are now available in a 4 gigabyte size for about \$40. The bad news: the 4 gigabyte chips are NOT compatible with most cameras or media card readers. These new chips are called "SDHC" for Secure Digital High Capacity. They require a special High Capacity camera and media chip reader to be used.

The reason for this compatibility problem is that no one ever thought that a 4 gigabyte media chip would ever be affordable, so the architecture was designed with a 2 gigabyte limit to save money. At that time, a 64 megabyte chip was large and expensive. Now the 4 gigabyte chip (60 times bigger at 1/4th the price) is available and relatively cheap. Such is the march of technology.

No such problem exists with USB thumb drives at any size.

New Technology 2

A few issues ago I mentioned that with the new Vista operating system, computers would be able to use media chips (such as used in digital cameras) to increase the speed of the computer. That ability is now available. The function is called "Windows ReadyBoost", and it uses the media chip as a buffer to speed memory swapping. When you plug in the media card, the system should recognize it and bring up a menu, with one of the items being "Use ReadyBoost". If you select it, the system will test the speed of the chip to see if it is fast enough to help the system (the "el cheapo" chips are often not fast enough). If not, it will so advise. If you decide to use the chip, the system will begin to use it for swapping. A 2 gigabyte media chip now costs about \$20. If you use it for ReadyBoost, you should empty it by formatting it before use. Also, be sure to power down completely before unplugging it.

Goodbye Microsoft Office: Hello Open Office

For many years I have been using Microsoft Office, including Word for document preparation and Excel for spreadsheets. Recently I bought a laptop with Vista. It came with a free version of Microsoft Works, which is a crippled version of Microsoft Office and which I will not use. It also came with a 60 day trial version of Microsoft Office. After 60 days it self-destructs and you must pay \$100 to continue to use it. While I have great respect for Bill Gates I decided not to send him the \$100 but instead installed Open Office from Sun Microsystems. It supports all of the Microsoft Office file types and has a "look and feel" that is almost identical. Best of all it is free, and after using it for a month I recommend it without reservation. This column was written with it. You can download it from: <http://www.openoffice.org>.

The only drawback is that it does not support the Outlook or Outlook Express mail systems. If you use them, you will have to send Bill Gates his \$100.

Internet telephone

Let's face it: land line telephone is going away. First it was attacked by cell phones: many young people do not bother getting a land line phone for the house. Now it is being attacked by the Internet. There are several vendors offering this capability, including Vonage, Verizon, Skype, and Comcast. I decided to take the step and chose Comcast because I already used them for video and Internet. It takes two minutes to fill out the form, and we can keep our phone number. Comcast handles all of the details

of making the switch. They come to the house, plug a modem into the video cable, and plug the house phone system into the modem. All house phones operate the same as before the change. When Verizon received word that they were losing us as a customer, they suddenly became very attentive. They showered us with attention and special discounts and offers. It was too late.

Intermediate Computer Training Course Description

The next offering of the Intermediate Computer Training Course will begin on Tuesday, March 11 at the Hudson High School 69 Brigham Street in room T110. All classes are held 2:30 to 4:00 PM. The instructor is George Champine. If you can use e-mail you are probably qualified for this course

The intermediate course has been expanded with several new sessions. The new sessions are: 1) Microsoft Vista, 2) Best free software, 3) taking and editing home videos, 4) computers and genealogy, 5) an expanded presentation of digital photography, and 6) the computer as an entertainment center. These are in addition to: Internet access, anti-virus, document preparation, spreadsheets, and e-mail.

A CD with a number of high-quality, tested, and free software packages is handed out at the beginning of each course. A 100-page set of notes of all of the lectures is also available. Problems being experienced by class members are discussed and answered during each class as a learning experience. The cost of the course is \$25.00 payable to the Hudson Senior Center. You can register by contacting Marie at the Hudson Senior Center, phone 978-568-9638, or by sending e-mail to george.champine@computer.org .