HUNTERDON COMPUTER CLUB

Newsletter

Volume 14 Issue 9   September 2001

> The presentation for the September meeting will be "SnagIt" and "Camtasia," screen capture and movie editing programs by TechSmith Corp. (www.techsmith.com)

HCC MEETING NOTES
(submitted by Don Colombo)

Jim Russ chaired the meeting in Lon Hosford absence. Jac Carrol, HCC Treasurer reported that we are in the black by about $800.

Jim Russ commented on the decline of free and low cost Internet services. He attributed this to the decline of advertisers who support most of the internet services. Advertisers no longer see the Internet as an effective advertising tool and many 'Dot Coms' have gone out of business in the last few years.

Jim said that there is general decline in the computer industry. Most people who need computers have already gotten them and the current speed is good enough for most people doing clerical tasks. There is not a need to buy an up grade.

The introductory discussion shifted from hardware to software upgrades. Jim Russ observed that time between software upgrades is decreasing and most upgrades are just not worth it. This was followed by comments from the group.

On a comment about written manuals no longer being included with software packages, Jim Russ stated that the manuals are on the disk. You have to boot the CD and select instructions from the index. Also, having the manual on the program CD gets rid of the problem of trying to locate the manuals that have been stuffed on some shelf for several years. As time passes by, the users amount of software grows and manuals are easy to misplace. Audience input allowed that many of the tutorials, manuals and instructions are on the

manufacturers web sites. They sites are often much more informative and are updated.

Another audience comment was that the pictures and illustrations are often cropped when the instructions are downloaded from the CD. Jim said that they look that way, but you have to scroll them down or 'Zoom out' to see the whole picture. Several people commented that this works, but in some cases the pictures are still cropped.

Added input from the audience—programs like Print Master Gold, Print Master Silver, and Print Master Platinum are all the same. The only difference between them is an extra disk of graphics or some minor add-on. The buyer should read the label and be mindful of what he/she is buying.

Jim Russ commented that many computer clubs are joining together to increase the head count so as to attract better speakers who will not show up unless there is over a hundred people. Jim also commented that this might be hard for HCC members, in that many are senior citizens and do not enjoy driving at night when the other computer clubs have their meeting.

An audience member asked who said that they could refill printer ink cartridges without a mess? Jim stated that he buys new since the last time he refilled a printer ink cartridge, he got more ink on himself than in the cartridge. Also, some refill ink will not print the same color or intensity. You should be cautious in that some refill ink will actually harm the printer's print head. Janice Latella said that different inks have different refill procedures. Some are harder to do than others. Look in the back of some of the PC magazines for refill ads. Some companies will refill the cartridges for you and even refurbish the print head if it is attached to the ink cartridge.

In regard to the next Digital Photography meeting, no date has been planned as yet, but Jim plans to discuss this with Bill Woodall in the near future. There will probably be a meeting some time in October.

Someone said that they are getting more e-mail ads than ever in the last few months. Jim Russ said that a few months ago he got about 15 ads a day. Now it is up to 28 ads a day. Janice Latella said to look at the bottom of the e-mail ad. Usually there is a place to check if you want them to take you off their list. If there is a place for any reply on their ad, you can write them a note to take you off. Jim Russ added that you might have to wait two to three months for them to act on your request to drop you from their mailing list. Also, if they continue to send you ads after three months, contact your ISP with a copy of your request. They will put an end to it.

The audience added a warning, by answering their ad, you will have confirmed you address to them and may actually increase your junk mail ads. Give them a 'bogus' e-mail address or even set up two e-mail accounts one for your friends and one for when you are requesting information or just surfing the net. Joe Burger suggested using the filter on your e-mail. Ref: June 2001 Newsletter. Most ads have key words such as XX, Wow, or Mortgage. Put the words common to ads in your address or e-mail subject filers. Jim's final comment was to protect your friends always use BLIND CARBON COPY or BCC when forwarding your e-mails, information, ads, or sending multi-addressed emails. Only your address will be shown in your e-mail and not all the addresses related to that e-mail.

AUGUST PRESENTATION
PC Upgrade and Buying Guide
Presenter, Jim Russ

Using an outline from Jtec Systems, Inc. Jim talked about the following topics:

When is it time to change your PC? (Upgrade or buy new)

When you don't want to load higher end programs because your computer can't handle them or you are out of room. When you are waiting for your computer to catch up with you.

Do I Upgrade Or Buy New? Ask yourself a few questions:

How old is my machine? If it's over 3 years it may be worthwhile. What brand and style machine is it? What type of motherboard? If the mouse and keyboard have identical connectors you may be able to upgrade. If you have a one-piece unit—don't bother.

What are the easiest upgrades?

Memory—this can lengthen your PC's life a little longer, but is not worthwhile for an old system. Video Card—it's almost guaranteed that you can find a more powerful video card to fit your system. CPU—this may be possible but check the voltage settings for the chips. Hard Drive—more room is always a plus.

How much power do I need?

Type A—home business, internet surfer:
500-800MHz AMD or Celeron, integrated video and sound, 10-20 Gig hard drive & 64MB of RAM.

Type B—business workstation: 700-800 MHz/PIII system with 16MB VGA, HDD size optional based on needs, 64-128MB of RAM.

Type C—the intense gamer: AMD with 1 GIG or higher/PIII or P4 with 32MB VGA, Digital Sound, 30-40 GB Hard Drive and 128-256MB of RAM.

Type D—the high-end business server type: there are many different platforms which can be custom built for the situa-tion with disk access speed and data recovery as your first priority.

What should I look for when shopping for a PC?

Service should always be a main concern when purchasing a new PC. No matter how much it costs, if you have problems and can't get help, you have a large expensive paperweight.

In order of importance for performance and upgradability:

Motherboard Architecture—If you want room to upgrade you do not want an integrated motherboard. VGA, MDM, etc. built into the board (SND, NIC ok). You want separate cards so you can replace them when needed.

VGA Card—Video Card is one of the most import aspects of a PC. You can have a powerful machine but without good video you will get choppy and grainy screens and slower performance.

CPU—CPU speed is very important, but don't be swayed by marketing techniques, which just list the CPU speed. Without the correct mix of the other components you will not get near the performance you should.

Backup Capabilities—Whether it is a ZIP drive, second hard drive or CD burner, you need to make sure you have the right backup capabilities. If something happens to your computer and you lose your data you'll wish you had a backup.

Hard Drive—Hard drive size is important but not as important as the brand. (An additional hard drive is easily added.) A hard drive has 3 major failure areas: bearings, heads, platters. These MUST be quality parts or you have a much higher chance of failures. The majority of computer crashes are caused by hard drive malfunctions.

Multimedia—CD, DVD, Sound and Speakers—These are your options for the "extras" which can turn a basic PC into a family entertainment center. Everyone uses his or her computer differ-ently so all of these options are personal choice.

Communications—Modem or LAN—The Modem used to be at the top of the list but with improved technologies in this sector, most modem brands connect to the Internet without too many problems. With Cable, DSI, and Satellite Internet connections, more and more LAN cards are being used in place of tradition modems.

Owning a PC can be a great experience or a nightmare. Remember you can buy a PC anywhere, but just know what you are buying.

QUICK TIP
(Smart Computing, Oct. 2001)

Many new peripherals come with USB (Universal Serial Bus) connectors. This includes mice. However, you may find that your computer doesn't have enough USB ports for all your devices unless you buy a separate USB hub (about $30 to $60). A cheaper alternative is to use a USB-to-PS/2 adapter with your mouse, if you computer has a free PS/2 mouse port. Logitech and Microsoft include USB-to-PS/2 adapters with some of their mice. If you didn't get one with your mouse, check with the manufacturer to make sure it will work with a PS/2 adapter before you buy one.

VIRUS ALERT
(submitted by Don Colombo)

Troj_Apost.A" is a worm rather than a Trojan horse, as its name suggests. The malicious e-mail arrives with the subject line "As per your request!" with the message, "Please find attached file for your review. I look forward to hearing from you again very soon. Thank you."

When the attached file entitled "Readme. exe" is executed, it will try to copy itself to the floppy drive. It will then self-propagate by e-mailing itself to all addresses listed in the infected user's address book.

YAHOO AUCTIONS
By Evelyn Stewart

When I decided to try selling my books on the Internet instead of letting the auctioneer sell them for a quarter a box, I tried to understand E-Bay and Yahoo both. Yahoo won. People tell me I would get more money on E-Bay, where they say there is more traffic, but I am cheerful about results so far and don't want the confusion of listing on both. The current batch of ten books is selling for a combined total of about $65. at the moment. My biggest sale was $177 for a first edition of The Yearling with author's autograph, but sales of $5.00 to $20.00 are common, and far ahead of a quarter a box. I scan and list books in lots of 10, and wait for auctions on one batch to close before I start another, to avoid confusion.

Many people said "You can sell anything on E-Bay" but pinning them down to specifics was not easy. In case you want to try it, here are the steps I'm using. E-Bay would be similar.

First you register as a seller. Then you register with Pay Direct as a way to collect payments. This is a slow process. You have to list a credit card, and a bank account with the correct transaction number, to which your riches can be transferred. Yahoo establishes your credibility by sending two small deposits to your bank and waiting for you to tell them the deposit amount. I have not heard how my bank likes processing two nineteen cent deposits.

You can also register with Pay Pal and Bid Pay and others. They all have security checks. Alternatively you can specify that you accept money orders and checks.

At last you choose an item to sell. Then you scan it or photograph it. I have found that items without pictures do not sell. Save the scan as a jpeg, and resize it to 1 Mb., the allowed maximum. Put it in a folder you can find again. My current items are in My Documents \Auctions\August B .

Now at last you are ready to click on Submit Item. At this point you need to give your seller's secure password, which is different from your Yahoo log-in password. Then study the category list, and decide if a first edition history book should be in Books Antique and Rare or Literature, or History. There are lots of subheading categories so keep clicking. There are so many thousands of entries for buyers to read that you need to work at reaching the ones who may care about your item.

Now comes the rather confusing page where you use your photo. Click on Browse. Select your jpeg file. Then click on Add Photo. Wait. If you have not resized correctly, Yahoo will do it for you and you will wait even longer. When the picture shows up, click Done. There is no other way to move on from this page to the space for your description. So if you choose not to use a picture, click Done anyway.

For rare books there are separate lines for title, author, pub., date, place, and then space for your description. For ordinary books there is one line for title and then the open space. I have learned to use the top line as an ad, or to use key words from the title, in other words, to use this as a headline and attention getter for the auction item. (Each item or sale is called an auction.) Then I list all the publishing details, dimensions of the book, number of pages, illustrator, condition, and finally content and comment. I try to give enough detail that the seller will not return the book complaining it is not what he expected.

When you have finished your description you check off the starting price, number of days the auction will run (max 10), time of day to close it, payment methods you accept, buyer pays shipping, seller ships on receipt of payment, or whatever else you want.. Experienced E-Bayer grandson tells me it pays to have your auction reach over a weekend. Other people have other theories as to when traffic is heaviest. I have settled on $1.00 starting price for all, 8 days duration, and 10 cents a day for "featured." Before I chose featuring, things did not sell. This combination

gives me a total of $1.00 cost to me for each book I list: 20 cents for the listing based on $1.00 starting price, and 80 cents for the feature. This simplifies figuring out whether I am losing or making money. For each item that sells Yahoo refunds half of the amount spent on featuring. So I am spending 60 cents on each book that sells, and losing a dollar on each one that doesn't. Two items in the current batch are not selling. Everything in the last batch sold. Often a thing that does not sell will sell when resubmitted.
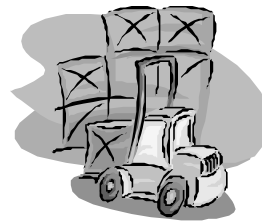
Click on submit, and the next page will show you your ad ready to be posted. You can edit at any time, cancel the sale, end it early, whatever. Click submit again and you're done.

After each sale, the buyer is invited to rate the seller, and vice versa. These ratings are available to anyone and can be used to judge the validity of the buyer or seller before committing to a transaction. Out of 75 or so sales I have made several friends and have only one person listed as not to sell to in future. The only problem I have is persuading people to send a mailing address after they have paid for an item. They may write using just the auction ID number. Yahoo keeps a lot of good records for you, but I have found it useful to have a transaction sheet for each item, with the auction ID number, final price, etc.

When the allotted days have passed, you will get an email from Yahoo saying the auction has closed with winners, or without winners. If with, you get a URL to click on that takes you to Pay Direct billing. Here you get the home town of the buyer, from which I go to USPS domestic postage calculator, enter the home town, get the zip code, look up the postage. Go back to the billing page, enter the shipping cost (postage plus my choice of adding $1.50 for packing materials and gas), write a message to the happy winner. I always give my address in case the buyer prefers to mail a check.

YAHOO AUCTIONS (cont'd.)

Meanwhile, the winner has also received word from Yahoo and will often write saying I am the winner of # xxxxxxxx and asking for total due, but hardly ever sending an address until asked in another email exchange

Now all you have to do is mail the package and start over again. Media Mail is a new postal category and is often even cheaper than Bound Printed Matter. Those handy and sturdy, free, red ,white and blue Post Office boxes are free until you mail something and then you must pay priority mail rates, which the buyer may not want to pay. Commercial boxes are expensive. One source is Meyers Corbox Inc. at corbox.com.

SHOULD I ALWAYS TURN MY COMPUTER OFF, OR CAN I LEAVE IT ON ALL THE TIME?
(submitted by Don Colombo)

We vote for turning your computer off if you're going to leave it idle for more Than a couple of hours. Otherwise, you'll waste energy and money (about 2 cents per kilowatt hour).

Some argue that cycling the computer's power hastens wear and tear on moving parts like the hard drive. While that may be true, modern hard drives last years in normal use. Chances are, your computer will live a lot longer than you want it to. Admittedly, it's easier to keep your computer on than to wait several minutes each time you start it up, but you should restart Windows daily anyway—it gets less reliable the longer you use it.
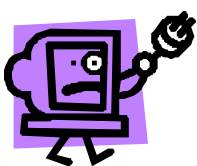
Finally, if you want to leave the computer on and save power, get one of the new Energy Star-compliant computers. (Hardware with the Energy Star logo has met certain energy-saving standards set by the EPA and Department of Energy.) And the industry as a whole is moving rapidly toward power-saving computers that go to sleep when unused for a period of time but pop back to life with the click of a mouse.

SEARCH ENGINE TIPS
(from HP Online)

Confused about the best way to find information on the Web? These tips will help you find what you're looking for.

use the right search tool
Not all search tools are created equal:

Search engines are programmed to automatically scour every corner of the Web and index what they find. The advantage of a search engine is that it will return a listing of every single document that contains your search terms. The disadvantage is it often produces thousands of listings, many of which are irrelevant. Three popular search engines are Excite, Alta Vista and Google.

Directories organize their listings according to subject, and are maintained by human beings. The advantage of a directory is its organization, which gives you more control over your search; the disadvantage is it features a limited number of sites, and you may miss a few important ones that a search engine would list. Yahoo, arguably the most well known search site on the Web, is a directory.

A third type of search tool is called a meta-search engine, which utilizes a number of other search tools to compile a comprehensive list. This type of search is slower, but the results can be very thorough. Dogpile is one such metasearch engine that lets you choose which search tools it will access.

Narrow your search—use wildcards

Most search sites use a combination of search engine and directory, but how do you know which one is right for you? Take some time to explore the different sites. Because each works a little differently, you might have to experiment a little to find the one that works the best for you.

quick search tips
Plug a word or two into any search engine, and you're likely to be faced with a list of sites numbering in the thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions.

Sifting through each listing to find the one nugget of information you're seeking could take hours. Fortunately, search engines come with built in ways to narrow searches and make your knowledge quest easy.

Add additional keywords. Using a plus sign (+) before each word signals the browser to look for documents containing all words, not just some. Eliminate keywords. A minus sign (-) tells the browser to ignore pages that contain that keyword. Search for whole phrases. When you put quote marks around a multi-word phrase ("one two..."), it will look only for documents that contain that exact phrase. You can use any combination of these symbols to target the exact subject of your search. Most importantly, remember to be specific. The more explicit you can be, the better your chances of finding what you need right off the bat.

power searching
Still not finding what you need quickly enough? Try these power tips:

Make a list of all the possible keywords your target could contain. Refer to this list to help narrow your search.

Use wildcards (*) to search for plurals or variations on a single word, or when you don't know the exact spelling. For example, entering "garden*" will return hits for garden, gardens, gardening, and gardeners.

Use the "related searches" feature found on most sites. Based on previous surfers' inquiries, these might turn up something your original search overlooked. Narrow the set of matches by doing a second search within your initial results. For example, if your initial search for "coffee" turned up too many sites, you could search only within those results for "Colombian."

Use the "Advanced Search" area provided by most search sites. You'll find specialized tools to help your search. Read the search guidelines for the particular site you're using. You'll find specialized tips for that tool that will help you use it more effectively.

A TAXING QUESTION

Computer Shopper
September 2001

To tax or not to tax Internet sales? That's the questiong—but don't expect an answer anytime soon.

The 1998 enactment of the Internet Tax Freedom Act (ITFA) established a temporary Net-tax moratorium, which expires in October.

While the anti-tax Bush administration has been quiet on the issue, a number of bills, both for and against Internet sales taxes, have since been introduced on Capitol Hill.

One such bill is Cox-Wyden IV, sponsored by Sen. Ron Wyden (d-Ore.) and Rep. Christopher Cox (r-Calif.), which extends the moratorium by five years and proposes streamlining tax-collection processes. The status of the proposed bill changes every day as negotiations continue, says Wyden spokeswoman Carol Buthrie.

David Brunori, an Arlington, Va.-based tax attorney and contributing editor to *State Tax Notes* magazine, says state governments fear this measure would infringe on their taxing authority.

While off-the-shelf software packages are available to track varying rates in the approximately 7,500 sales tax jurisdictions in the United States, one major challenge for businesses will be to track which products and services are taxable in each region.

Brunori's guess is that sales tax will eventually be a fact of life for e-businesses. "I believe that what we'll end up with is some kind of agreement in which a lot of Internet and mail-order sales will be taxed, collected by the vendor, remitted to the state, and streamlined to be made as painless as possible."

Gwen Moran
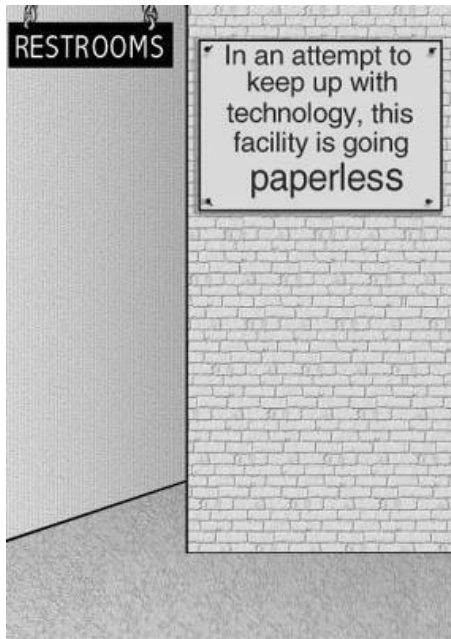
WHERE TO MAIL YOUR DUES

If you would like to renew your club membership but are unable to attend a club meeting at this time, please send to:

Donald Colombo
18 Lambert Lane
Lambertville, NJ 08530

$25 = single
$30 = family
$190 life

HCC NEWSLETTER is published monthly at 267 Federal Twist Rd., shortly after the regular meeting, which is normally on the third Saturday. Subscription is included in the annual dues of $25. for an individual, $30. for family. Non-member subscriptions, out of state only, are $8.00 a year. Contributions are eagerly sought, and may be on paper, by phone, on disk, or file or email to mreuter@ptdprolog.net .

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Computer Volunteers
ALL MEMBERS

If you've ever felt computer illiterate and just a little embarrassed about your technical skills, check out the following, excerpted from the Wall Street Journal:

(submitted by Don Columbo)

Compaq is considering changing the command "Press Any Key" to "Press Return Key" because of the flood of calls asking where the Any Key is.

AST technical support had a caller complaining that her mouse was hard to control with the dust cover on. The cover turned out to be the plastic bag the mouse was packaged in.

Another AST customer was asked to send a copy of her defective diskettes. A few days later a letter arrived from the customer along with photocopies of the floppies.

Another Dell customer called to say he couldn't get his computer to fax anything. After 40 minutes of troubleshooting, the technician discovered the man was trying to fax a piece of paper by holding it in front of the monitor screen and hitting the "send" key.

A Dell technician received a call from a customer who was enraged because his computer had told him he was "bad and an invalid." The tech explained that the computer's "bad command" and "invalid" responses shouldn't be taken personally.

A confused caller to IBM was having troubles printing documents. He told the technician that the computer had said it "couldn't find printer."

The user had also tried turning the computer screen to face the printer but that his computer still couldn't "see" the printer."

An exasperated caller to Dell Computer Tech Support couldn't get her new Dell Computer to turn on. After ensuring the computer was plugged in, the technician asked her what happened when she pushed the power button. Her response, "I pushed and pushed on this foot pedal

and nothing happens. The "foot pedal" turned out to be the mouse.

Another customer called Compaq tech support to say her brand-new computer wouldn't work. She said she unpacked the unit, plugged it in and sat there for 20 minutes waiting for something to happen. When asked what happened when she pressed the power Switch, she asked "What power switch?"

Another IBM customer had troubles installing software and rang for support. "I put in the first disk, and that was OK. It said to put in the second disk, and I had some problems with the disk. When it said to put in the third disk, I couldn't even fit it in...." The user hadn't realized that "Insert Disk 2" meant to remove Disk 1 first.

In a similar incident, a customer had followed the instructions for installing software. The instructions said to remove the disk from its cover and insert into the drive. The user had physically removed the casing of the disk and wondered why there were problems.

A woman called the Canon help desk with a problem with her printer. The tech asked her if she was running it under "Windows." The woman responded, "No, my desk is next to the door. But that is a good point. The man sitting in the cubicle next to me is under a window and his printer is working fine."

Tech Support: "O.K. Bob, let's press the control and escape keys at the same time. That brings up a task list in the middle of the screen. Now type the letter "P" to bring up the Program Manager." Customer: "I don't have a "P". Tech: "On your keyboard, Bob." Customer: "What do you mean?" Tech: "P" on your keyboard, Bob." Customer: "I'm not going to do that!"

Makes you wonder how the heck we ever managed to populate this planet!! After reading these, you'll know that we really should have died out way earlier!!
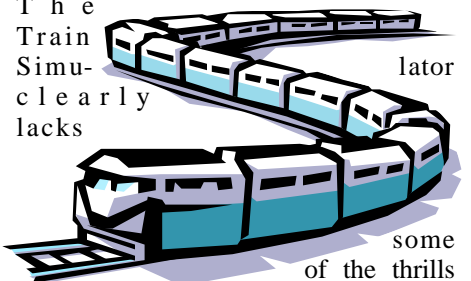
TRAIN SIMULATOR

(software review from Computer Shopper, Sept.2001)

Railroads are romantic. They call to mind bygone eras when steam locomotives ferried silver and gold down from the mountains in the Old West or passenger trains carried GIs back to their sweethearts after World War II. Even today, the massive power of locomotives can evoke the same type of awe as planes and race cars. But while there are plenty of racing and flight sims, the only train games available so far have focused on strategic empire building. In Train Simulator, however, Microsoft has created a realistic simulation of the iron horse—one that holds its own next to its racing and flying peers.

Train Simulator puts you in control of six different railway routes, covering more than 600 miles of track. Each cab view features animated controls and readouts similar to what you'd find on real-life engines.

When you're ready to get into the meat of the sim, you can tackle activities that model everyday railroad operations: sticking to a tight schedule as you load and unload passengers at multiple stations, managing a freight train through bad weather, and conducting complex switching operations in freight yards. In the switching operations, you need to get the right cars from different rail sidings coupled to your train in the right order—no mean feat in a large yard with lots of mixed cars.

The Train Simulator clearly lacks lator some of the thrills of its racing and flight-themed brethren. But this meticulously crafted and often beautiful virtual railway has what it takes to satisfy both hard-core players and those who merely want to enjoy the ride.

YOU CAN RUN,
BUT YOUR PLATES CAN'T HIDE
(Smart Computing, Oct. 2001)

Law enforcement officers have had lots of help from technology in the last few decades, from the introduction of the computerized AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) to the computers that now ride along in many squad cars. The on-board computers are especially helpful, making it easier for officers in the field to get the information they need on vehicles, suspects, and outstanding warrants.

But sometimes it's tough for an officer to type a license plate number into a computer to get the data he needs while in pursuit of a suspect. Once again, however, technology is stepping up to help in for form of a license place recognition system from View Systems (http://www.viewsystems.com) called PlateView.

Using the PlateView system, law enforcement agencies mount digital cameras behind the grilles of their patrol cars. These cameras can photograph license plates from considerable distances, whether standing still or moving and digitally compare them to others stored in a law enforcement database. This way, officers can keep an eye on suspects (or traffic) while PlateView automatically calls up information they would previously have had to search for manually or call in to dispatchers.

SOFTWARE MAY REPLACE THE
EYE CHART ON THE WALL
(The New York Times, Aug. 23, 2001)

For decades, rudimentary vision tests have remained almost entirely unchanged. Even grandparents would recognize the ritual: subjects are asked to stand or sit several feet away from a poster size eye chart, cover one eye and squint at rows of capital letters. Nothing could be more low-tech.

In the last few years, however, vision testing has taken a leap into the digital world. Companies are now developing Web-based vision tests that can take those capital letters and display them on computer screens in random order, for example, quelling the urge to cheat by memorizing the rows. Online color and contrast tests, as well as evaluation products that catch reading problems, are also becoming available.

A few vision test are already online, like those at www.eyeplanet.net, which are designed for parents who want to determine if their children need to see an eye doctor, and the demonstation program at www.thevisionplace.com, which has been created to screen for eye diseases in people 20 or older. Gerald Horn, an ophthalmologist who developed the eye-disease test, said that a more sophisticated version is being evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration as a potential replacement for the $15,000 instruments that doctors use.

One piece of software already on the market is VisionRX, an online vision test that is being used in pilot programs in school and motor vehicles departments. It first asks participants to calibrate their display screens by choosing a rectangle that is the size of a dollar bill. They are then told to sit a specific distance from the screen. Soon various versions of the letter E appear, rotated for four directions. (Other images appear in the color and contrast tests.) Participants are asked to click on the arrow that points in the same direction as the E.

The software is being marketed as a solution to those endless waits in line in school auditoriums during vision-testing day or in the dreaded Department of Motor Vehicles.

"We have the last piece of the puzzle to entirely automate the D.M.V. process," said Jeffrey Stewart, chairman and founder of VisionRX. The software is not yet being used by the D.M.V.'s for at-home testing—there is still too much

risk of cheating, state officials say—but in New Mexico this spring, seven motor vehicles offices performed a test of the program. Despite a few problems experienced by people who were not familiar with using a computer mouse, the online programs were more efficient, said Keith Perry, deputy director of the state's Motor Vehicles Division.

Now that driving tests are also conducted on computers, "we're looking at making it part of the total system," Mr. Perry said.

In schools, where vision tests are typically administered to an entire student body in a gymnasium or auditorium on one day each year, the software is being marketed as a way to give school nurses more flexibility and computerized reports.

Aurora Public Schools in Aurora, Colo., tried the software last year in the first, fourth and ninth grades. Sue McCarrol, the coordinator of health services for the schools, directed the program. Typically, she said, she has to haul out specially designed cabinets that contain the eye charts and a lighting apparatus. But with the on-line program, she simply had to ask students to come to a computer laboratory. "If there was anyone we missed," she said, "we wouldn't have to get all the machines set up again."

She added that there was one unexpected drawback to the tests. Because they are on computers, she said, students treated them as if they were video games and "they want to go fast to 'win.'" Some students were clicking through the test so quickly that they were giving incorrect answers to images that were the same size as others they saw correctly.

The software is not equipped to watch for such a situation, and if those problems are detected, a message starts to scroll across the bottom of the screen: "please slow down."
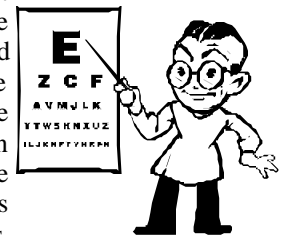
Hunterdon Computer Club

Next Meeting Saturday, September 15, 2001
Hunterdon Medical Center
Rt 31 Flemington NJ

8:30 A.M. To Noon

Program: "SnagIt" and "Camtasia"
Screen capture and movie editing programs by TechSmith Corp.
(www.techsmith.com)

Guests Welcome –   all ages all levels

HCC NEWSLETTER