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IN THIS ISSUE

The SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization, Inc. (SEMCO) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), group dedicated to providing information, education and a forum to computer users (professional and amateur) and other interested individuals. Membership in SEMCO is open to all individuals 18 years or older. Persons under 18 years may become members through the sponsorship of a parent or guardian. Dues of $30/year include monthly DATA BUS and free personal ads.

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DEALS COLUMN
from the DealsGuy
Greater Orlando Computer UG
by Bob "The Cheapskate" Click

Income Tax Problems, Continued From May Issue

I returned to the AARP volunteers to see why they disagreed with TaxAct. Since I took the printout of my TaxAct version, they quickly compared the numbers and found that the one prepared by their person was incorrect. She had miscalculated the ratio of income to Social Security received, and we actually did have to pay on some of our SS income. I was glad to know I had made the right decision. Anybody can make a mistake, and I'm just glad I checked it all out before I sent it in.

Beware If You Remodel A Dell

I read this in the Macon Users Group's newsletter and thought you might like to know about it. Dell computer is a very popular choice, and many people own them. What if you decide to upgrade your Dell's power supply or motherboard? You could easily fall into a trap, if you are inexperienced, since these parts in a Dell are proprietary. Seems that several wiring connections are reversed. You are advised to do your homework. Either get the parts from Dell, or replace "both" the motherboard and power supply if you use non-Dell parts. I hope this information prevents somebody from encountering a serious problem had they not known.

Deals

As for the deals, I have been busy this month and simply didn't have much. Two vendors I tried to contact didn't respond. I've been working on my Web site a lot, and my deadline crept up fast. I have a mixed bag, thanks to my readers. Last month's deals from Gene and Linda Barlow are good indefinitely <http://www.ugr.com/order/>, and the Metlund hot water pump deal is still good for this month <http://www.gothotwater.com>.

Need Memory? I Think I Do, But Can't Remember

Lots of people purchase their memory on the Web, and a very popular place is from Crucial. Did you know that they have a special deal just for user group people? Neither did I. Thanks to Russell Albach of The Alamo PC Organization, I can pass this information on to my readers. Go to <http://www.crucial.com/usergroups>, and you'll find yourself eligible for a 5% discount. However, if you took advantage of the exceptionally good user group special offer from Intel for APCUG Comdex attendees, you won't get any help from Crucial because they do not carry RDRAM. If you need memory, many consider Crucial highest in quality. I checked with their sales department before writing this up, and they said to go ahead.

Plenty of Choices For An Office Suite

In the past, I have mentioned several office suites that were either free or low cost. This is just a reminder list for your

perusal. I realize that they may not have all the features that you would get in MS Office, but you can save a lot over purchasing the big names. It is a known fact that most office suite users only know about 30% of a program's capabilities, so why be captive to a big name? Below are some alternative office suites:

<http://www.gnome.org> (Windows & Linux)

<http://www.hancom.com> (Windows & Linux)

<http://www.gobe.com> (Windows & Linux)

<http://www.thinkfree.com> (versions for Windows, Mac, & Linux)

<http://www.staroffice.com> (not free any more, but not expensive, Windows, Linux, & Sun Solaris)

Mac Support Site

I'm sure I don't have many Mac readers, but many user groups are multi-platform so I'll include this sent to me by a Mac user. It is said to offer lots of goodies. Check out <http://macsupport.about.com/mlibrary.htm>. Unless I miss my guess, most of the Mac users already know about this one, but I'm including it anyway.

Fed Up With Doubleclick Cookies?

I don't remember where I saw this, but some of you may have noticed that if you use AdAware or another spyware sniffer, it usually finds a cookie by Doubleclick on your machine. Take it off, and it will be right back. They actually provide a way to opt out of that situation. Point your browser to <http://www.doubleclick.com/us/corporate/privacy/privacy/ad-cookie/>. One click at the bottom will do it, but be sure to read the caveat on their Web site. After opting out, it tells you which cookie NOT to delete. Delete that one

and you will have just defeated your objective.

Free Photo Editor

GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), which boasts many of Photoshop's features without the high price tag, will create layers, feather, manipulate text, and even animate. You'll find handy floating palettes just like in Photoshop as well. One drawback noted in the write-up I read is no support for GIF files. Download it at <http://www.gimp.org/~tml/gimp/win32//downloads.html>.

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound.

Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <Bobclick@mindspring.com>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com> for past columns. I have also been busy putting up some interesting new articles on my Web site so take a look.

Bytes of Law Warranties for Computer Systems?

By Rollie Cole and Julie Sipe

At Fall Comdex, we met and interviewed a lawyer who has launched a national campaign to represent disgruntled buyers of computers "without fee." His name is Craig Thor Kimmel, and he is based in Pennsylvania. (We have

contact information for those interested in him.) He feels he can afford to do that because, if he wins, the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act requires the supplier to pay his fees. What is all this "warranty stuff," and what does it mean?

A warranty is a promise by a seller to a buyer that a product being sold will meet certain standards. If the seller is very explicit about this promise and the standards involved, that is an express warranty. If the seller is quiet, the law in each state may hold the seller to "implied" warranties. There are two of these warranties: One, the warranty of merchantability, promises that the good being sold will be of the same quality as goods normally sold in that market, neither better nor worse. A second, the warranty of fitness, only applies in special circumstances where the seller has told the buyer that the good being sold will be "fit" (i.e., appropriate) for a special purpose. A supplier may "disclaim" these warranties in certain circumstances, selling "as is," for instance. To disclaim, the seller needs to use certain procedures as to language, font size, etc.

The Manguson-Moss Warranty Act was passed in 1975 to "promote understanding" about the validity and scope of warranties on consumer goods, according to one of its proponents, Senator Moss. But the Act does not merely tell consumers what the warranties they receive mean; it also places affirmative obligations on suppliers.

The Manguson-Moss Act applies to all "consumer goods." "Consumer goods" are those that are "normally used for personal, family, or household purposes." While the majority of computers may still be sold for business use, the Federal Trade Commission has said, "The percentage of sales or the use to which a product is put by any individual buyer is not determinative. For example, products such as automobiles and typewriters, which are used for both personal and commercial purposes, come within the definition of consumer product."

If suppliers (basically manufacturers or sellers) provide a "full" warranty, or one that meets the Act's requirements, they must then fix a defective or nonconforming product within a reasonable time free of charge. If repeated repair efforts fail to remedy the defect, the consumer may choose a replacement product or a refund. The Act also provides that the person giving the warranty (i.e.,the warrantor) cannot disclaim implied warranties, although the warrantor may be able to set reasonable limits on those warranties in some circumstances, if it follows required procedures.

All of these "consumer rights" are fascinating to lawyers, but the real question for techies is whether they apply to computer hardware and software.

Computer software often comes with a document that says it is "licensed," not sold. In addition, computer hardware and software works in combination, and the possible combinations are almost infinite. What is a fair standard for a computer system, especially if the seller is not allowed to sell it without the implied warranties?

The warranty of fitness can be limited by what the seller says. It arises most clearly when the buyer has sent out formal bids with a specific requirement, and the seller has proposed a system of hardware and

software in response to that bid. Informally, it arises when the buyer says something like "I need a computer to read e-mail and do word processing," and the seller says, "this computer will do both those things."

The warranty of merchantability is limited by what a court will determine is reasonable, given the state of the art in the industry. In computer terms, one might ask what performance, across what combinations of hardware and software, should be expected? For instance, a "modern" computer probably would not be expected to run some ancient DOS program; a PC would not be expected to run a MAC program; an older computer might not be able to run the latest and greatest version of a well-known program, etc. Kimmel thinks that sellers sometimes try to "overuse" this limitation. At the same time sellers think that buyers sometimes try to "overextend" the standard of merchantability, by complaining that the computer will not run 17 programs at once, for instance.

So, the first question is whether the system sold is a "consumer good" or not. If it is, implied warranties probably apply unless the situation is outside the allowed limits. If it is not a consumer good, then the warranties that will apply are governed by all the circumstances surrounding the sale, especially the paperwork. Once we know what warranties (if any) apply, then the question is the reasonable interpretation of that warranty.

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Bytes of Law
The Law of Digital Sound

By Mary Jane Frisby

Watching TV a while ago, I was intrigued by an interesting advertisement for Apple's new iMac computer. A young man is sitting alone in a theater, and on the stage are a variety of music stars, ranging from Liz Phair to George Clinton, who are ready to perform and waiting for the man's instructions. The message of the ad was "Rip. Mix. Burn." The idea was that with the latest iMac you can "burn" copies of your CDs with such ease that making your own compilation CDs will be as if you were directing your favorite recording artists to perform for you. What interested me about this commercial was the question of whether consumers who use a computer—Apple's or anyone else's—to copy music could be breaking the law (i.e., "liable for infringement under the Copyright Act").

It's not that encouraging people via advertising to copy their CDs is a new thing. The giants in the consumer electronics industry, whether it's Philips sound systems or the Sony mini disc, frequently advertise their products by showing vibrant young people making their own "mix tapes" or compilation CD's and playing them for their friends. Most people seem to have a vague idea that they are somehow entitled by law to make personal copies of music, and for the most part, they are correct. What intrigued me was whether doing it from a computer device, given the court decisions in the Napster case, would make a difference.

The vague sense among the populace that it is okay to make copies of music is based on the Audio Home Recording Act (AHRA), w.30, which Congress passed in 1992. The Act has been codified as Chapter 10 in the Copyright Act, and its principal provision says that there cannot be a lawsuit brought for copyright infringement that is based on the manufacture, importation, or distribution of either a digital audio recording device such as a DAT tape deck, or a CD burner, or a digital audio recording medium such as DAT tapes or CD-Rs (the Act also covers analog recording devices and analog recording media). More importantly for our purposes, the Act offers similar protection from lawsuits against consumers who use such devices and media for making recordings of music for noncommercial use.

So doesn't that cover people like the guy in the commercial who will use Apple computers to make copies of their favorite musical recordings? It depends. It turns out that in order to receive the protection of the AHRA immunity from suit for copyright infringement, manufacturers of digital audio recording devices and digital recording media must meet two conditions. The first relates to technology; the second relates to, of course, money.

First, a little background. The origin of the Act is based on a compromise that stemmed from a lawsuit brought by the recording industry against Sony for Sony's DAT device. According to this compromise, the recording industry acquiesced to technology that would allow consumers to make digital copies of copyrighted music. In exchange, Sony and the rest of the consumer electronics industry agreed to abide by certain conditions that would place some controls on the ability to make downstream copies (that is, copies of copies) and compensate the music and recording industries from lost sales due to copying.

The first condition is that digital audio recording devices must have a Serial Copy Management System or its equivalent. That is, the copies that are made of musical recordings cannot themselves be able to be copied. This is supposed to inhibit piracy. Also, information that may be contained in the original musical recording (such as digital watermarking) must be preserved in all copies of the musical recording. This is supposed to allow the ability to trace a homemade copy of a musical recording to the original copy.

The second condition requires those who manufacture, import or distribute recording devices and mediums for making recordings to make statutory-determined royalty payments to the Copyright Office for each device or medium distributed. The Copyright Office manages these funds and distributes them to the recording industry and music publishing industry. For instance, for each CD burner sold, and for each DAT tape sold, the consumer pays a hidden "tax" that is forwarded by the manufacturer to the Copyright Office. Thus the Act reflects a balance, a quid pro quo, between the music publishing and recording industry on one hand, and the consumer electronics industry and consumers on the other.

A further limitation on the protections afforded by the AHRA is

the fact that the Act only covers certain types of recording technologies. The Act defines a "digital audio recording device" as basically any machine commonly distributed to individuals for their private use having a digital recording function that is designed or marketed primarily for the purpose of making a "digital audio copied recording." The Act further defines a "digital audio copied recording" as basically a digital copy of an original digital music recording. Therefore a CD burner, whether it stands alone or exists as a component on a computer, may be a "digital audio recording device," depending on how the device is designed or how it is marketed. Because Apple's ad campaign touts the music-recording function of its CD burner above its other functions, it arguably fits within the statute's definition of a digital audio recording device. Therefore Joe Consumer's use of this device to make copies of original CDs most likely falls under the protections of the AHRA.

Some interesting issues emerge. If Joe Consumer can make copies of CDs and be immune from being sued for copyright infringement, how far can he go? Can he make a thousand copies, so long as each is burned from the true original? Can he distribute his copies to his family, friends, co-workers, or even strangers? The Act states that it protects "noncommercial" uses by consumers. By implication, that might mean that so long as he doesn't make any money from these transactions, Joe can act as the Johnny Appleseed of music recordings, spreading his copies far and wide. On the other hand, if such mass copying were to be immunized then the delicate quid pro quo balance

the Act strives to maintain would be undermined. Also, the legislative history behind the Act indicates that the intention of Congress was to protect "private, noncommercial use." Under this understanding, Joe can make copies basically only for his personal, private use, not for his friends or anyone else. I suspect the reality is somewhere in between. No, Joe can't make copies for the world, but I doubt making a compilation of his favorite tunes for his girlfriend will get Joe into trouble.

Another interesting question has to do with computer hard drives. If it's okay to use a CD burner on a computer to copy CDs, then what about the computer's hard drive? The decisions in the Napster case, and a case called RIAA v. Diamond Multimedia Systems, have shown that using a hard drive to copy music files does not meet the requirements for protection under the AHRA, since a hard drive does not meet the definition of a "digital audio recording device" or a "digital audio recording medium." Consequently, Joe may want to hesitate before bypassing his CD burner and dealing solely in MP3 files, since he is then likely to fall outside of the AHRA's immunity from suit.

Still, Joe may not be entirely without rights in this situation. Particularly if Joe is making copies of his own lawfully obtained CDs, then using a hard drive to copy and store files made from his CDs may fall under the fair use privilege. Just as consumers who use VCRs to tape television broadcasts for later viewing (known as "time-shifting") have been found to be engaging in fair use, courts have indicated that consumers who use their

own computer hard drives to copy and store their own music CDs (call it "space-shifting") are also making a fair use of their CDs.

As more and more technologies emerge for fulfilling the apparently insatiable desire of consumers to "Rip Mix and Burn" others' copyrighted music, the applicability of the AHRA and these surrounding questions will continue to be raised. I can only hope that the commercials for these new devices will be as entertaining.

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Ultimate Backup
By Warner Mach
SEMCO Member

I set up my mom to use e-mail through AOL. There were some doubts in the family how well this would work, but it has been highly successful, and she is able to e-mail her favorite relatives and friends.

However, I had some concerns with the possibility that a bad hardware or software glitch might sour the experience (and that I might be in for an extended repair session). Especially I was concerned that she would get a computer virus, or something of the sort; but I did not want to confuse things by installing virus checkers and firewalls.

We were lucky with her initial computer set up; there were no major problems. When the time came to upgrade, my solution was to get a custom machine built with two removable hard drives. There were three separate hard drives in total, each in its own holder, and I cycle through them.

Periodically I copy from the main drive to the secondary drive using Norton "Ghost." I boot up from the Ghost diskette and copy under DOS, so no Windows files are open. The whole copy only takes a few minutes. After making the copy, I switch to the secondary drive so that the newly copied hard drive is out of the machine.

A few weeks ago I had an unexpected opportunity to test this system when my mom complained that the dial-up had started to take a very long time.

When I checked the system I could see that it was doing a number of retries on the dial-up and was getting connection failures and switching to the secondary phone numbers.

I tried a number of obvious things, including changing around the dial-up numbers, replacing the modem board, and trying different phone outlets. These operations did not help.

I then called the phone company to get a check on the line. The phone technician reported that the line had no problems.

Finally, I called AOL, even though it seem unlikely to me that it was their problem. The AOL person asked me: (1) Whether the "buddy" pop-up appeared when I logged on; (2) Whether I could get to the Internet. Since I was exclusively concerned with e-mail, I could not answer these questions. However, I did indicate that the problem had started happening in the previous couple of weeks, and I was puzzled by why things would change.

She indicated that the computer was "like a car": You can drive a car for some time, and then a bearing, or some other part, gives out, and you have a problem. Since I have been involved with mainframe software for over 30 years, this explanation struck me as rather strange. Software does not "wear out" (even though techies like to kid about "bit decay" and "software rot"). Generally you can figure that software "goes bad" when something gets changed.

I got an "incident number" from the AOL person and hung up, so that I could do further tests on the computer. When I logged on through AOL this time, I noted carefully whether a "buddy" pop-up appeared and whether I could get to the Internet. And, indeed, both of these tests failed!

I then got the back-level removable hard drive that I had backed up a couple of months before and put it in the drive and booted up. Using this drive I was able to dial to AOL with no problem at all, and I saw the buddy pop-up and was able to get to the Internet.

I noticed one other thing when I logged on with the back-up disk: AOL apparently detected that the software was back-level and downloaded (without asking permission) an "upgrade."

I called the AOL help desk with my incident number and was transferred to a (different) technician. I explained my whole series of tests, and he indicated that Microsoft Windows "dial up networking" had somehow gotten corrupted. If I had been running Windows 98, he would be able to assist me over the phone, but since I was running Windows XP, I would have to take the computer back to the manufacturer! Hopefully I was still under warranty! He seemed to regard this as a minor matter. I regarded it as a major problem.

Because of the backup system, all I had to do was update a couple of addresses in the address book, and mom was back in business.

It is my suspicion that, at some point, one of the automatic AOL "upgrades" caused a problem for "dial up networking." Apparently this problem had been solved between the time that I created the back-up hard drive and the time that I booted from it, since the download that I received after the post-boot download did not recreate the problem.

The analogy between cars and software might better be phrased: "What would happen if a new engine were periodically downloaded to your car?"

The other question that has to be asked is why can't you buy standard PC's with multiple removable hard drives? Clearly this is an obvious answer to a lot of user problems.

Avoiding Self-Inflicted Computer Disasters
By Alan Luber

"We have met the enemy, and he is us"
– Walt Kelly

Who among us has not been the victim of a computer disaster at the hands of a virus writer, computer hacker, or some other factor beyond our control? We always tend to think of computer

disasters as having some external catalyst, but as they often say, most accidents occur in the home.

You are probably familiar with the old joke about the guy who walks into the doctor's office and says, "Doc, it hurts when I do this." The doctor's sage advice is, "Don't do that."

And so it is with one of the most common types of computer disaster: the self-inflicted computer disaster, also known as the Homer Simpson computer disaster.

Here are four tips for avoiding self-inflicted computer disasters.

Slow Down!

Haste is a major cause of self-inflicted computer disasters. For example, when installing an application, you may receive a pop-up window asking if you wish to overwrite a file that is present on your computer with a different version of that same file. Similarly, when uninstalling an application, you may receive a message asking if you wish to delete a file from your computer that may no longer be needed. For the record, you should never allow an install program to over-write an existing older version of that same file, and you should never allow an uninstall program to delete a file if leaving it on your computer will do no harm. [*One should probably never say never. ED.*] The problem is that, depending on how the question in the pop-up window is phrased, you may need to answer "yes" or "no" to effect the appropriate action. If you proceed hastily with the install or uninstall without carefully reading the question and pondering the response, you are likely to answer incorrectly and precipitate a computer disaster, overwriting or deleting something of vital importance.

Don't Be Overzealous

In the old days, we had to squeeze every ounce of performance out of our slow computers and every megabyte of space out of our puny hard disks. Although this is no longer necessary in a world of 3Ghz processors and 160MB hard disks, many have not abandoned this mentality, and it gets them into trouble more often than not. For example, there are dozens of web sites offering thousands of Windows XP tune-up tips. Most of these tips make me shudder because they provide imperceptible gains in performance at enormous risk. My advice here is simple: if it ain't broken, don't fix it.

And while there is nothing wrong with good housekeeping—keeping your hard disk clear of clutter and debris—I run into too many examples of bad housekeeping. ("Alan, I deleted a lot of stuff off of my computer that I didn't need, and now my speakers don't work.") If you are not absolutely certain whether something can be safely deleted from your system, leave it alone. As Dirty Harry said in Magnum Force, "A man's got to know his limitations."

Don't Be Gullible

Every few weeks I receive an e-mail warning me about a new computer virus. These messages tell me that if I have certain files on my computer, my computer has been infected, and that I should immediately delete these files. Such warnings are always virus hoaxes, intended to coax the gullible into deleting critical system files from their computers. Be suspicious of all such warnings. All antivirus software vendors have a section on their web sites devoted to virus hoaxes. Before

you take any action, verify that the virus warning you received was legitimate. (Hint: I have yet to receive such a warning that was legitimate.)

Unfortunately, antivirus software cannot protect us from ourselves. But wouldn't it be great if Symantec came out with a Norton AntiGullible to complement Norton AntiVirus? I can see it now. A virus hoax from a well intentioned but uninformed friend arrives in my inbox. Norton AntiGullible swings into action, with a warning message that says:

"Warning: you have just received an e-mail message from an idiot advising you to delete critical files from your computer. This message has been automatically deleted to prevent you from shooting yourself in the foot, and a reply-to-all response has been automatically generated to help protect others on the message's distribution list."

Why, the very thought of it brings a smile to my face.

Don't Be Reckless

The easiest way to cause a self-inflicted computer disaster is to make changes to your computing environment with reckless abandon. Computers are unstable equilibriums, and change and stability are mutually exclusive concepts. Every time you install an application on your computer, you are making four implicit assumptions:

1. The application will not conflict with your operating system, other applications, or hardware.

2. The application's install program will not cause any problems by automatically overwriting or modifying files that are shared by other applications.

3. The application is well behaved and won't wreak havoc on your computer.

4. The application will uninstall cleanly without leaving any vestiges of any problems it caused on your computer.

Given that any change to your computing environment can disrupt its tenuous, unstable equilibrium, it always amazes me that some people think nothing of downloading, installing, and trying dozens of software packages without regard for the potential disastrous consequences.

Here's a suggestion for how to avoid problems when trying new applications. Suppose you want to download and evaluate trial versions of six different photo management software packages. Before you download and install any of these applications, I urge you to make a complete backup of your hard disk using a disk imaging tool. I recommend Symantec's Norton Ghost for this purpose, and I provide detailed step-by-step instructions for backing up and restoring your hard disk in my book, PC Fear Factor.

After you have backed up your hard disk, download and install each of the applications and play with them to your heart's content. Once you are finished, instead of uninstalling the applications, restore your hard disk from your backup. This is the only approach that is absolutely guaranteed to get you back to the same point of equilibrium that existed prior to installing the applications. After you have restored your system, purchase and install the one package you have elected to use.

Perspective
Author Unknown

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following:

There would be:

57 Asians
21 Europeans
14 from the Western Hemisphere
8 Africans
52 would be female
48 would be male
70 would be non-white
30 would be white
70 would be non-Christian
30 would be Christian
89 would be heterosexual
11 would be homosexual
6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth, and all 6 would be from the United States
80 would live in substandard housing
70 would be unable to read
50 would suffer from malnutrition
1 would be near death
1 would be near birth
1 would have a college education
1 would own a computer

When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent.

The following thoughts are also something to ponder:

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If your parents are still alive and still married, you are very rare, even in the United States and Canada. If you can read this message that just came to you, you are double blessed in that someone was thinking of you; and furthermore, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.
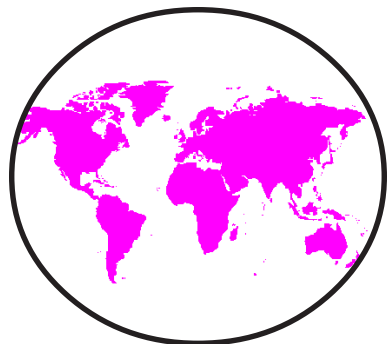
Bits and Bytes
The Rest of the Story
By Bill Agnew
SEMCO Member

The April DATA BUS included several Tips giving definitions of bits, bytes, and megabytes used in the computer world. Those definitions were in the metric International System of Units (SI), a measurement system based on the number ten. But that is only part of the story. "Here is the Rest of the Story."

The metric, or decimal system is the system used mostly by computer users like you and me. Storage devices like hard disks, memory, and digital cameras are most often described with metric measurements of bits, bytes, megabytes, etc. But computer manufacturers and software engineers often use a different system, the binary system based on the number two. That's because it is easier for them to do their work in that system, and the computer industry actually grew up using that system. You and I don't normally need to know or deal with the binary system, but it may be wise to be aware of it, or you may be tripped up sometime when you run across it.

In both systems a bit is still a bit (b), and a byte (B) is still normally 8 bits (an octet), but after that there is a significant difference in meaning of kilobytes, megabytes, etc. As an example of the possible confusion, a megabyte to a manufacturer of storage devices may be $10^6 = 1,000,000$ bytes, while to a computer manufacturer it may be $2^{20} = 1,048,576$ bytes. The familiar 3.5 inch floppy disk has added to the confusion by being mislabeled 1.44 megabytes, when, in fact, it is not 1.44 in either the binary or decimal (SI) systems. It should be 1.41 in the binary system, or 1.47 in the decimal system. Fortunately, it appears that the floppy disk is on its way to oblivion, so this particular confusion may be moot.

In 1998 the International Electrochemical Commission (IEC) approved a new set of standards that defined these terms in such a way to eliminate the confusion. The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) took up the same issue and proposed the new standards to the International Organization for Standards (ISO), and in 2002 the IEEE voted to adopt a Trial-Use Standard 1541 containing the new definitions. This lasts for 24 months, during which time comments are accepted. The standards are shown in the table on the next page.

You can find these definitions on the Internet along with some additional explanation at <http://freedos-32.sourceforge.net/standards.html>, or <http://www.cofc.edu/~frysingj/binprefixes.html>.

It might be noted in the table that all prefixes except the decimal kilo are capitalized. This exception results from the fact that traditionally the kilo in the metric system has always been lower case. Also, it is understood that the first syllable in each of the binary prefixes is pronounced the same as the corresponding prefix in the decimal system, and the last "bi" in the binary system prefixes is pronounced as "bee."

So don't get too excited over the binary definitions, but in case someone springs them on you, you can now keep your head (nose) in the air because "Now You Know the Rest of the Story!"

TABLE OF PREFIXES					
Binary Multiples			Decimal (SI) Multiples		
Prefix	Name	Factor	Prefix	Name	Factor
Ki	kibi	$2^{10} = 1,024$	k	kilo	$10^3 = 1,000$
Mi	mebi	$2^{20} = 1,048,576$	M	mega	$10^6 = 1,000,000$
Gi	gibi	$2^{30} = 1,073,741,824$	G	giga	$10^9 = 1,000,000,000$
Ti	tebi	2^{40}	T	tera	10^{12}
Pi	pebi	2^{50}	P	peta	10^{15}
Ei	exbi	2^{60}	E	exa	10^{18}

Steve Bass
Pasadena IBM Users Group
steve_bass@pcworld.com

Hello, PR?
BASS SHOWS YOU ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO GET TECH HELP

Having trouble getting tech support for the troubling crashes because of your upgrade of SimpleCD Copier? What about the tech people who refuse to replace the failing hard drive in your Zornac notebook (which failed the day after the warranty expired)?

With tech support relying on $3 a day, third-world people, you may have to work harder and dig deeper in order to get the help you need. Fair warning, this is a convoluted process and full of dead-ends, and something only online researchers are going to enjoy.

Hello? Public Relations?

Here's the trick I use when I have a problem with a product and can't get the help I need from tech support. I find the PR person, briefly plead my case, and hope for the best. Most times I get service that's far superior than when calling the company's customer service or tech support line—and often miraculous. (And yes, I even do this anonymously using an e-mail alias, so they don't know about my writing background.)

Here's how I do it. I head for the company's Web site and dig around for the PR representative. If they're listed, it'll likely be either on the "Contact Us" or "About Us" page.

If you can't find that specific page, or there's nothing about public relations, head for Google. Try it: In Google's search field, type everything in bold, e.g., **www.microsoft.com press**. Substitute another company name for Microsoft and see what happens.

Google Experiments

Unfortunately, some companies refer to PR as Corporate Communication, Media Contact, or PR. (Oddly enough, few companies use "PR flack" or "PR flak.") Well, kids, Google is a powerful tool, and if you know the right syntax, it can help you find the PR people no matter where they're hiding. Try these Google combinations exactly as you see them:

\<www.microsoft.com pr\>
\<www.microsoft.com media contact\>
\<www.microsoft.com corporate communication\>
\<www.microsoft.com press release\>
There's no way around it—you'll need to experiment with Google's syntax.

If you use quotes around key words, Google's forced to look for that exact string of characters. In the last example above, wrapping press release in quotes may get you different results. Ditto if you change press release to press contact. Try it.

As you begin honing in on your target, add a few more words and make substitutions. For instance, say you're looking for a press person to help you with SharePoint, MS's online collaboration tool. If you tried **www.microsoft.com "press release" sharepoint**, you'd get lots of hits from MS's office in South Africa. Substitute press contact, and you hit some jackpots.

Become a Social Engineer
As you play around, be prepared to hit lots of dead ends. For instance, a buddy of mine was having trouble with his Toshiba notebook. I volunteered to help and used my Google tricks on Toshiba's site. I was quick to find a page full of Toshiba Press Releases. Unfortunately, it showed only old press releases. But down at the bottom was pay dirt: A link that said "Back To Main Press Release Page." I didn't find a PR person for notebooks but did find two contacts that might lead me to the right person. The first was a public relations contact for another Toshiba division, LCD screens; the other was a list of three people at Toshiba's outside PR firm.

My next step was to write to each person and ask if they could connect me with the right PR person, someone who deals with Toshiba notebooks and laptops. I didn't offer a reason why I was asking—I didn't want to let them know I was about to start kvetching. And I wrote them individual e-mails because, if I wrote to them all in one e-mail, there's a chance one person might write back and say that they couldn't help; I didn't want everyone to see that.

My first dose of bad news bounced right back at me: none of the outside PR e-mail addresses were any good. But the Toshiba LCD screen guy was pleased as punch to supply the name, e-mail address, and phone number of the right PR person at Toshiba.

Case Pleading
The story ends pretty well. My buddy wrote to the public relations person. He pleaded his case, and the PR person was able to get Toshiba to replace the hard drive. The key ingredients in his persuasive e-mail and phone call:

Don't threaten: Explain how you've tried your darndest to work with customer service and tech support. But they were adamant and refused your requests.

Show loyalty: In this economy, most companies will do their best to get a new customer—and keep an old one. Make sure you let the person know how much you want to remain a customer.

Try bargaining: If you're willing to help me make this right, you say, I'll do my very best to tell everyone I know how helpful and cooperative you've been. Of course, they know the implication—you'll tell everyone what junky products the company produces. But don't say it. No matter how much clout you may have, bullying doesn't always do the trick.

Beseeching: The product is what I rely on to do my work, you can say, and I beseech you (okay, they won't understand that—use implore, or even beg) to help me get it fixed.

Move it Up a Notch: Often a PR person will tell you that their hands are tied. Ask if you can talk directly to the person who did the tying. Often you'll end up talking to a product manager who can make things right with a quick e-mail.

If you think about it, these methods will not only work with computing and software companies, but with practically any product. In the meantime, my dogs are snubbing their Science Diet kibble, so I'm off to find a four-legged PR person.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He's also a founding member of APCUG. Check his Home Office columns at <http://snurl.com/homeoffice> and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at <http://snurl.com/signup>.

Letter From The Editor

Here are some distinctions that are often not well understood by many people:

Scientists discover. They study the universe, physical and social, and try to understand it. Their customer is society as a whole, which must support them.

Mathematicians develop relationships. They organize information discovered by scientists and others in such a way that increases the understanding and permits prediction. Their customer is all those who can use their services.

Engineers design. They use the Scientists discoveries and the Mathematicians relationships to develop detailed plans for products and processes that will have a maximum benefit for humans at minimum cost. Their products must appeal to customers.

Inventors also create new products, but usually by trial and error rather than by utilizing science and mathematics. They too must sell their products.

Technologists/Technicians build, test, operate, and repair. They fabricate the products designed by engineers, test them, operate the processes, and fix the products and processes when they fail.

Customers/Users buy and benefit. They pay to use the products and processes created by Engineers and Technologists, and they feed back to the Engineers what does and doesn't work and what new products they would like.

Individuals are not limited to playing only one role. Engineers and Mathematicians often make scientific discoveries; Scientists sometimes design new products; Technologists often invent new products, and we are all Customer/Users.   Bill

Tip: Smartwrap™ rewraps text within your document, clipboard, or message, and eliminates ">" and extra spaces. From Selznick Scientific Software, LLC. Try it at <http://selznick.com>. $15 for Windows, $18 for Macintosh.

**BOARD MEETING
5/11/2003
Carol Sanzi**

Board Members Present: President Gary DeNise, Treasurer Roger Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow, Warner Mach representing SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier, Publications Committee Chairman Bill Agnew, and Members at Large Bob Clyne and Chuck Morey. The meeting was called to order at 12:07 p.m.

Old Business: Treasurer Roger Gay reported that SEMCO's bank balance is $4823.61. SEMCO's membership now stands at 85. Expiring in April is the membership of Randy Mims.

Bob Clyne moved to reimburse Warner Mach $7.38 for refreshments. Tom Callow seconded the motion, and it was carried.

In order to publicize SEMCO meetings, Gary DeNise reported that the Groveland Township Comcast Community Channel is running a meeting notification. He is still attempting to have a notification run on the Brandon and Clarkston stations.

New Business: Gary DeNise is offering to host a June 7th picnic at his home at 5364 Grange Hall Rd, Holly, MI 48442. Gary's phone number is 248-634-7514.

Jack Vander-Schrier is unable to conduct the SIG-IBM Intermediate session this day because of previous commitments. Tom Callow will extend the SIG-IBM discussion of favorite Internet sites.

Bob Clyne moved to adjourn. Tom Callow seconded the motion, and it was carried. The meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGs)

SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach

June 8: Troubleshooting Windows Problems: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will lead a discussion on how to troubleshoot problems under Microsoft Windows

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Jack Vander-Schrier

June 8: Instant Messaging Software And Why You Should Use It: Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier will discuss the different instant messaging programs, AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Instant Messenger, Windows Messenger, and ICQ.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP
Rotating Volunteer Hosts

June 8: Q&A: Member directed discussion.

SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

July 7: Meetings held first Monday, 6:45 pm, at the Oak Park Library. The library is located at 14200 Oak Park Blvd., Oak Park, MI. Phone: (248) 691-7480. Directions: 14200 Oak Park Blvd. is 9 1/2 Mile Road, located west of Coolidge. Best route from freeway is to take I-696 to the Coolidge exit. Head south on Coolidge for 1/2 mile to Oak Park Blvd. and turn right. **Topic: Wide ranging discussion of computers and computing.**

July 2003 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after meeting)
SEMCO & SIG DATA, & MEMBERS' ADS - Deadline: Sun, June 15, 11:59pm.
Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use Editor address on Page 2; e-mail address: <agnew@bignet.net>. PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline if possible.
BUSINESS ADS - Deadline: Second Friday monthly. Mail **unfolded** camera-ready copy; payment in full made out to SEMCO, to the Editor (address Pg 2).

Bill Agnew
agnew@bignet.net
(to post monthly computer group info)

**CALENDAR-OF-EVENTS
OTHER GROUPS**

AAIICI (American Association of Individual Investors, Computerized Investors)
June 28–Saturday, 10am-noon (4th Saturday); W. Bloomfield Huntington Bank, Orchard Lk Rd., S.of Maple Rd. Info: Jack Lockman at 313-341-8855 or <thunder@tir.com .

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)
Aug. 6–Wednesday, Boat Trip (No meeting in July): Rm 201, Clara E. Mackenzie Library-Science Bldg, 323 Erie St., Port Huron. Ron Walters, 810-679-4144. Web: <http://www.bwcomp.org>.

DCOM Computer Club
June 13–Friday, 6:30 - 8:30pm (2nd Friday); Henry Ford C.C., Patterson Tech Bldg, Ford Rd/Evergreen, Rm T143, Parking Lot C. Info: Doug Piazza 313-582-2602.

Delta Computer Club
June 26–Thursday, 7 pm (last Thursday); Bay de Noc C. C., Escanaba. Info: Gordon Nelson, Pres. & Editor at <gnelson@bresnanlink.net> or 906-428-1014.

DPUG, (Detroit Palm Users Group)
June 12–Thursday, 7pm (2nd Thursday); Kensington Community Church, northwest corner John R & Square Lake Rds, Troy, MI. <http://www.dpug.org>. **Free membership.** Topics: Garmin iQue 3600 GPS/Palm unit.

MacGroup Detroit
June 22–Sunday, 3pm-5pm (Special Day); Bloomfield Twp. Library, 1099 Lone Pine Rd. (corner of Telegraph Rd.). Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 313-571-9817. <http://www.macgroup.org>. Topic: Adam C. Ernst, MacWorld Columnist, Apple's Latest Software.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)
June 21–Saturday, (3rd Saturday); Coffee 9:00am, SIGs 9:30am, Main meeting 11:00am. Mack Open School, 920 Miller Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. <http://www.mactechnics.org>). Info: Cassie at <cassiemac@yahoo.com> or 313-971-8743.

MCUG (Michigan Computer Users Group)
June 19–Thursday, 7pm (3rd Thursday); 35271 Rockingham Dr, Sterling Hts., MI 48310-4917; Info: Jerry Zinger, Pres., <kahuna15@comcast.net> 810-792-3394.

Michigan Apple Computer User Group
June 12–(2nd Thur), MAC SIG; June 12–(2nd Thur), Golden Masters SIG; June 19–(3rd Thur), Green Apple SIG; Eagles Hall in Clawson, 174 Bowers St (one block North of 14-Mile and one block East of Main). Carl Pendracki 248-647-8871 or <carlpen@aol.com>. Web: <http://www.themichiganapple.com>.

Oak Park Computer Club
Meets every Friday, 10:15am at Oak Park Recreation Bldg., Oak Park Blvd. west of Coolidge.

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)
Sept. 2–Tuesday, 7:30pm (1st Tuesday, No Meeting in July and August); Carpathia Club, 38000 Utica Rd, Sterling Hts, Pres. Don VanSyckel at <Don@VanSyckel.net>, 586-731-9232; Web: <http://www.SterlingHeightsComputerClub.org>.

SVCA (Saginaw Valley Computer Assoc.)
June 12–Thursday, 6:30-9:00pm (2nd Thursday); Zauel Library, Shattuck & Center Rds., Saginaw. Web: <http://www.svca.org>.

Wayne State U. Mac User Group
June 14–Saturday 10:00am-Noon (2nd Saturday); at Mich.com, 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Info: Lorn/JoAnn Olsen 248/478-4300 or Denny MeLampy 248-477-0190.

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS
SEMCO Members
Helping the Community

Beth Fordyce is accepting Macintosh computers, components, peripherals, manuals and software (working or broken) for Immaculate Heart of Mary School PreK–8th grade, 175-200 students for computer science classes. C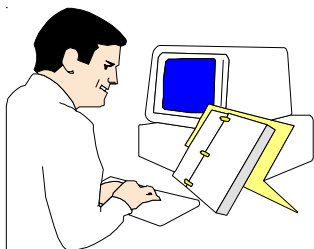ontact Beth 734/453-0349 7pm–10pm or bfordyce215331MI@comcast.net You may also contact the school directly: Sister Mary Stephanie Holub 19940 Mansfield (Greenfield/8-Mile area, Detroit) 313/272-0990

MAY REFRESHMENT DONORS
Warner Mach, Coordinator
Betty MacKenzie
Carol Sanzi
Roland Maki
Phillip Charns

COMPUTER RESOURCE PEOPLE

This is a list of members willing to be resources for other members to call when they have hardware or software questions.

Are you willing to help members learn?

Which software programs are you familiar enough with?

It is not necessary to be an expert, but just have some familiarity with the program and be willing to help someone starting to learn it. Please give this some thought and volunteer at the next group meeting.

Almost Anything: Vander-Schrier	**MS Office for Windows:** Callow
AutoCAD: Comptois, Gay	**MS Word:** Clyne
Genealogy: Cook	**Networking:** Callow
IBM PC Hardware Issues: Clyne, Gay, Yuhasz	**Novell Netware:** Yuhasz
Operating Systems: Callow, Clyne, Yuhasz	**Quicken:** Clyne, Gay
MAC Hardware and OS Issues: Yuhasz	**Geocaching:** Cook

Clyne, Bob—810-387-3101, 9am-10pm .... clyne@lodden.com
Callow, Tom—248-642-1920 9am–5pm .... tcallow@vmddlaw.com
Comptois, Jerry—248-651-2504, anytime .... jerrycandotoo@juno.com
Cook, Stephen—313-272-7594, eves .... scook48227@ameritech.net
Gay, Roger—248-641-7799, 9am-10pm .... rgay@voyager.net
Vander-Schrier, Jack—586-739-7720, 12-8pm .... jvanders@myself.com
Yuhasz, Steve .... Help@yuhasz.org
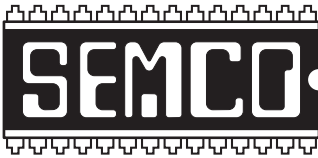
**SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN
COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.**

SEMCO CALENDAR—June/July

SCIENCE & ENGINEERING BUILDING, OAKLAND UNIVERSITY, ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

June 8–SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

SEMCO <u>Board</u> Meeting at 12:00 noon, **Room 164.** For Officers and SIG Chairpersons. Other members are invited to attend.

SEMCO <u>General</u> Meeting at 1:30 pm, **Room 164.**

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

<u>**SIG-IBM**</u> 1:45 pm, **Room 164. Program: Troubleshooting Windows Problems:** SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will lead a discussion on how to troubleshoot problems under Microsoft Windows.

<u>**SOCIAL PERIOD**</u> 3:15 pm, **Room 172.** Refreshments! (Reminder: We must maintain a neat environment.)

<u>**NOVICE-IBM GROUP**</u> 3:45 pm, **Room 168. Program: Q&A, member-directed discussion.**

<u>**SIG-IBM Intermediate**</u> 3:45 pm, **Room 164. Program: Instant Messaging Software And Why You Should Use It:** Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier will discuss the different instant messaging programs, AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Instant Messenger, Windows Messenger, and ICQ.
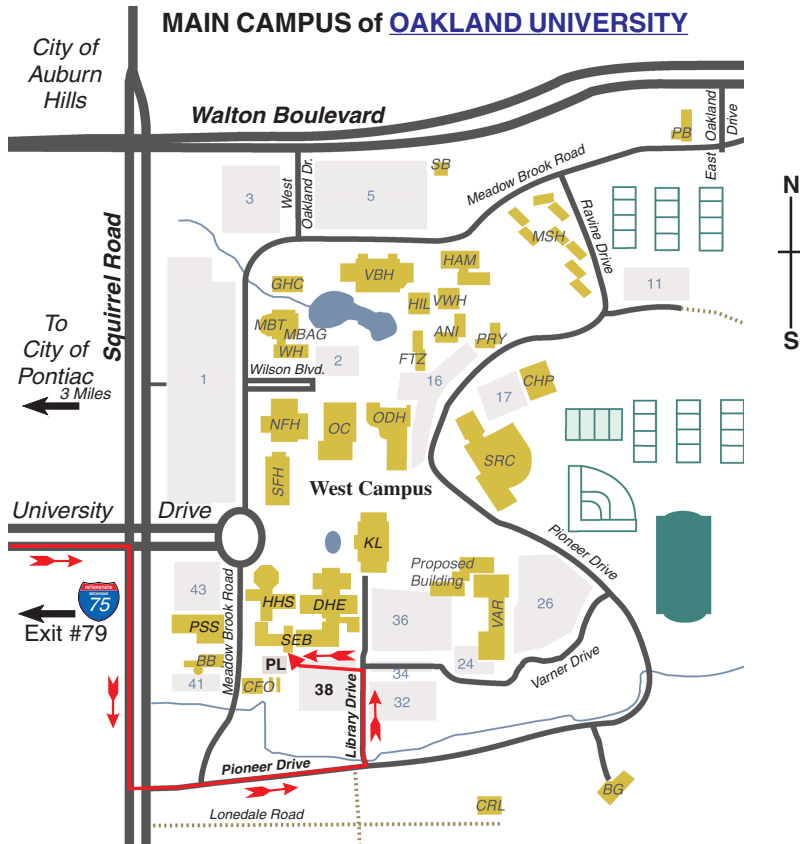
<u>**July 7–MONDAY , 6:45 pm**</u> (Meet 1st Monday), <u>**SIG-ADVANCED**</u> Oak Park Public Library, 14200 Oak Park Blvd., Oak Park, MI. Phone: (248) 691-7480. Directions: Oak Park Blvd. is 9 1/2 mile Road, located west of Coolidge. Best route from freeway is to take I-696 to the Coolidge exit. Head south on Coolidge for 1/2 mile to Oak Park Blvd., and turn right. Info: Franz Breidenich 248-398-3359. **TOPIC: Wide-ranging discussion of computers & computing.**

<u>**July 13–SUNDAY**</u> (Meet 2nd Sunday). <u>**SEMCO**</u>, 1:30 pm. **Topics: To be announced.**

http://www.semco.org

PUBLIC INVITED

(Please copy this and the next page to post on your bulletin board)

MAIN CAMPUS of OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

City of Auburn Hills

Walton Boulevard

West Oakland Dr.

SB

3   West   5

Meadow Brook Road

MSH

Squirrel Road

11

To City of Pontiac
3 Miles

GHC   VBH   HAM

HIL   VWH

MBT   MBAG   ANI   PRY

WH   2   FTZ

Wilson Blvd.   16   17   CHP

1   NFH   OC   ODH

SFH   SRC

West Campus   Pioneer Drive

University Drive

KL

43   Proposed Building

HHS   DHE   36   26

Exit #79   PSS   SEB   VAR

BB   PL   34   24

41   CFO   38   32   Varner Drive

Library Drive

Pioneer Drive

Lonedale Road   CRL   BG

N
S

PB
East Oakland Drive

Ravine Drive

MAP LEGEND

SEB   **Science and Engineering Building**
DHE   **Dodge Hall of Engineering**
KL   **Kresge Library**

Note: SEMCO meetings are in the **Science** (west) wing of the **Science and Engineering Building**.

DIRECTIONS

Driving north on I-75 (from Detroit and suburbs), take Exit 79 (University Drive), stay to the right on University Drive to campus entrance. Turn right (south) on Squirrel Road (at traffic light which is just outside campus); turn left on Pioneer Drive (next street to left). Turn left off Pioneer Drive onto Library Drive (second left) toward Kresge Library. Turn left before you get to the buildings, into parking lot 38 on the left. Proceed to the far end of the parking lot and up to the next lot. After parking, enter the first set of glass doors (at the SE corner of the building).

Member of
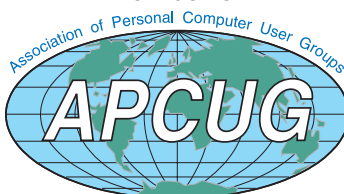
Association of Personal Computer User Groups
APCUG

SouthEastern Michigan
Computer Organization, Inc.
P.O. Box 707
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-0707

SEMCO (future meetings)
  June 8
  July 13

SEMCO: A Community Organization
Helping People for the 21st Century