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Computer Organization, Inc.

DATA BUS

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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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Computer Repair Feedback

Last month I mentioned that one of my computer problems was caused by "Online Armor." I found I wasn't the only one who had problems with that firewall. In my feedback, two people said it interfered with the installation of certain MS updates to their OS. I also remembered having that problem, but at that time, I thought I had accidentally created a firewall rule that caused the problem when installing the MS updates. Some repeatedly failed to install, no matter what I did.

The answer was suggested at our Tech SIG. I eventually got into the habit of shutting down my firewall, and also Spybot (which sometimes caused update installations to fail), so the updates would install correctly, but a few Office updates still failed to install so it was still a problem at times. Thanks for the feedback.

Minor Problem, Though

I've found that since using the Reimage Repair, two of my Office programs need to be reinstalled. I'm not sure what happened, but when I try to start them, they say "installing," but nothing happens. I'll work on that when I get time.

Not Much Work Lately

We worked the Hearth, Patio, and Barbecue show <http://www.bvents.com/event/194492-hpbexpo-hearth-patio-and-barbecue-expo> that had plenty of home barbecue products, but also plenty of fireplace displays that looked fascinating. The electric ones looked like they had beautiful flames and fooled many who thought they used gas. Some of the cooking products were filled with specially treated glass beads that held the heat very well. I didn't see any of those cooking food near my post, but there was food being cooked all over the show and I didn't get away from my post much.

Due to health problems, we have not been working any shows lately, and we are missing some good ones. We missed the diabetes show, which is usually an interesting one. Right now, both my wife and I have a serious bacterial infection that the doctor said was highly contagious so we have quarantined ourselves for now. It's a problem getting old for some of us, but the alternative to getting old really sucks.

Even Some Large User Groups are Feeling the Pinch

I heard from the editor of a user group that used to consistently have many members, and had a very impressive newsletter with its articles written mostly by their members. He asked about my health, and during our messages, he indicated that in spite of being the many-member group it had been for several years, and offering a monthly newsletter that looked like a magazine on a newsstand, their membership is at an all time low, but they are still holding together. They also went to a PDF newsletter several years ago and they still have great authors within their own group. I just can't understand people giving up the kind of help and camaraderie a user group offers.

No Luck With Vendor Announcements

I received three vendor product announcements for new products with user group member discounts, but none

of the contacts replied to my e-mails asking for ordering instructions for my readers. Why bother announcing the products if we can't order them? That problem is quite common any more. I had another item that I've had around for a while and I asked if I could get a special offer for my readers these days. The guy said he would set things up in a couple of days, but so far, I'm still waiting. However, I have not given up on him yet and I liked the product, which is learning courses for software.

Under the circumstances, I looked up some items that I've been saving for future use and hopefully you'll find them interesting. Most of them were found in user group newsletters.

Worried About Your Laptop Getting Stolen?

You always stand the chance of your laptop getting stolen when you're carrying it with you, because the worst can always happen. Of course, all your personal information goes with it if that happens, but if you have the data encrypted, that part won't matter, so you simply purchase a new laptop and use your backup to bring it up to date. However, Prey Project can be a big help if you prepared yourself with it ahead of time <http://www.preyproject.com>. If you decided to get set up with Prey Project to protect yourself in the event of a theft, simply go to their Web site and report the theft. Prey will start attempting to connect your computer to a network so it can start sending back silent reports; and maybe even pictures if your laptop also has a camera. It will also immediately start sending back reports, and the current IP address along with reports on what the user is doing. It's a small program so it won't take much to install it.

The product is free, but they do accept donations. I read about this item in the Jan. 2010 Monitor, an outstanding newsletter of The Rochester Computer Society, put together by the dedicated Editor, Sally Springett <http://www.rcsi.org>. No author was listed for this item. I never fail to read her newsletter from cover to cover.

Another Daily Deal

"GoingToday" has the same "one daily item for sale for 24-hours" policy as other daily sale sites I've given you and you never know what it might be until they offer it, but this site <http://www.goingtoday.com> is said to cater more to musicians and music lovers. I only browse it occasionally and the deals I have mostly seen are for quality sound equipment, although the prices were not bad. In my younger days, I was also a musician, but those days are long gone so it won't work for me when they offer musical instruments, but its fun to check it occasionally.

Help Troubleshooting Your Computer Problem

This resource has good recommendations and seems to be a good one. If you prefer to troubleshoot your own computer when a problem arises, sometimes the fix is elusive and you still need help. I'm told this site has helped many with their problems, but it is by e-mail only so you will need to send a good description of your problem. Your help may come from anyplace in the world, but the more help, the better when a solution is needed. <http://www.protonic.com/> is the URL for your help and a little research will tell you that it is well rated by some respected services.

Martin Kessler sent this to me some time ago, but I lost it and ran across it recently, however, the e-mail address I

have for Martin is no longer good. I hope he is still active in his user group.

Help With Updates

Many who subscribe to the Windows Secrets newsletter by Brian Livingston may already know about Secunia, because he recommended it some time ago, but it is a good service so I am including it here. I also found this in MUG Monitor (Jan 2010), newsletter of Macon Users Group. Liz Russel writes an excellent monthly article called tech talk <http://www.maconusersgroup.org> and included Secunia in that column.

They have a free program you can use to scan your computer for needed updates. It is called Secunia Software Inspector <http://www.secunia.com/vulnerability_scanning>. Actually, if you are a home user, you can have your computer scanned online or you can scan your entire network with the Corporate Software Inspector. If something on your computer needs an update, Secunia will go out and get it for you on its own. Not everyone favors Secunia though, so look it over carefully before you try it.

How Do You Replace Your Favorite Utilities?

Ninite will help you do that by letting you choose from all your favorites and will also install them for you. If there are items you'd rather not have, Ninite will leave them out. Get it at <http://ninite.com>. I read about it in Bits of Bytes, the newsletter of Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, <http://ppcompas.apcug.org> and no author was listed. You can find out more by visiting the Ninite Web site. Bits of Bytes is a very interesting newsletter. It's not lengthy, but every page is fascinating and I'm lucky to receive it.

That's it for this month. I'll have some more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies 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 at bellsouth dot net>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>.

Free Utilities From CPUID Describe System Details By Ira Wilsker

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As regular readers of this column know, I am a fan of utilities, especially if they are free! Frequently, situations arise where it is necessary to know the details of a computer, including specifics about its software, hardware, drivers, and other components in order to diagnose a problem and make recommendations. There are several fine utilities that can perform these functions, but several that I have been using recently come from the historical city of Dunkerque, France, courtesy of their publisher CPUID Software.

CPUID software is best known for its namesake product, CPUID, which is as it says, a utility to identify the details of the CPU chip installed in a computer. This is often necessary to know if the computer is being benchmarked (performance measured), upgraded, or undergoing major repairs. The latest CPUID software is named CPU-Z, version 1.55. This small utility displays the processor brand and model

number, the type of socket it uses (necessary to know for replacement or upgrades), speeds, and other details about the CPU chip, which is the central "brains" of the computer. Sometimes it is desirable or necessary to replace a motherboard, or determine the BIOS on the motherboard. The motherboard is the central platform on which most of the other internal components are either directly attached to, or otherwise connected to, and provides much of the internal communication between the components. While generally very reliable and long lived, sometimes it is necessary to replace a motherboard. The BIOS, an acronym for "Basic Input - Output System" is typically attached to the motherboard, and contains the first code run by a PC when it is initially powered on. The BIOS identifies and initializes the video card, keyboard, mouse, hard drive, CD/DVD drive, and other key components. The BIOS contains software in a non-volatile ROM chip, and is typically firmly attached to the motherboard. Most BIOS chips can be updated and upgraded with software provided either by the BIOS manufacturer, motherboard maker, or computer manufacturer. CPU-Z identifies the brand of BIOS, the version of its software, and the date of the software stored in it; with this information, it is somewhat easy to determine if the BIOS contains the latest software. Keeping the BIOS updated is not a critical task if everything appears to be working OK, but for those of us always trying to tweak our computers and capitalize in the latest offerings, this is good information to have. One warning is appropriate here; if the user is considering updating the BIOS, be absolutely sure to explicitly follow the manufacturer's directions to the letter! In a worst case scenario, failure to do so will result in an expensive paperweight, but in many cases, there is a procedure to "roll back" or restore the BIOS to its earlier status.

When I ask people how much memory they have in their computer, they are often clueless, or erroneously confuse the memory with the storage capacity of their hard drives. Clicking on the "Memory" tab of CPU-Z displays the type of memory, the amount of memory, speed, and other characteristics. The "SPD" tap allows the user to cycle through the memory sticks installed in his computer, displaying the capacity of each stick, the type, manufacturer, part number, and other information. This information may be necessary if the user wants to add or replace memory in the computer.

The "Graphics" tab displays information about the display device, including the brand, model number, chipset, speed, and memory. Since the video card makers often release updates, enhancements, and new features, this information could be very useful.

CPUID also publishes several other utilities, and another one that I found useful is PC Wizard 2010. PC Wizard was first published in 1996, and is considered one of the most comprehensive system information utilities available. Since the hardware industry is very dynamic, with new hardware being introduced on a daily basis, PC Wizard is frequently updated, typically monthly. In addition to identifying and displaying the details of the hardware and software on the computer, PC Wizard can also benchmark the performance of the individual computer components, as

well as the entire computer. By noting which components and software are the performance laggards, the user can then determine what, if any, practical solutions may improve performance. PC Wizard utilizes a series of icons representing each of the components or software titles installed on the computer, and can determine the hardware, configuration, system files, and resources used by the computer. The benchmark selection can test and display the performance of the entire computer, the CPU (processor chip), memory, video, hard drive, external storage devices (like CD/DVD and USB drives), and other hardware components. In addition to displaying the performance of the hardware itself, a "Compare Results" shows how the user's computer compares to others. The results are also displayed and announced (audio) using the wizard avatar and voice synthesis similar to the "Vox Proxy" PowerPoint accessory. PC Wizard provides the user with a wealth of information.

While CPUID has several utilities available for free download, one of those that I also found very useful is HWMonitor, which is a shortened "Hardware Monitor ." This utility is also available in an enhanced commercial version, HWMonitor Pro, which adds additional features and functionality. HWMonitor (the free version) can identify the power supply in the computer, and display the real-time voltages, temperatures, and fans in the power supply. This is important to monitor the health of the power supply, and consider a replacement or upgrade if necessary. Many users are unaware that their computers report the temperatures of various components in the computer, which is important in that heat is one of the big killers of components. Being somewhat colonial, I selected to display the temperatures in Fahrenheit (F) rather than Celsius (C). Usually there are some fans in each computer which are critical in exhausting the heat from the components, and bring in cool outside air. HWMonitor tracks and reports the performance of the fans, which can enable the user to easily and quickly see if a fan is failing; a dead fan can lead to overheating and damage or destruction of the computer's components. This utility can also track and report on the temperatures of the motherboard, CPU chip, video card, and hard drive.

Most of these utilities are available for 32- and 64-bit Windows PCs using recent versions of Windows such as XP, Vista, and Windows 7, although some of the utilities also have builds that are explicitly for Windows 98. The files are relatively small and fast to download, and consume minimal system resources, such that they do not noticeably degrade system performance. These utilities could be a useful asset to anyone who wants to keep up with the performance, condition, and health of his system. WEBSITES:

<http://www.cpuid.com>.

<http://www.cpuid.com/softwares.html>

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We are all familiar with the common search engines, such as Google, Bing, AllTheWeb, and Yahoo. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of search engines, and they all pretty much provide somewhat the same information. Last year Microsoft introduced Bing, its latest search engine iteration, which also had some decision making capabilities and built-in intelligence. Microsoft used its power and wealth to inundate the computing world with information and promotional materials about Bing in an attempt to steal market share from Google and the other major search engine providers. At about the same time (May 15, 2009), a much smaller company, Wolfram Research, the publisher of the Mathematica software, introduced its computational knowledge engine WolframAlpha.

WolframAlpha is not a traditional search engine that displays listings of web links, but instead displays the answer to a question, formula, or other inquiry. For example, if I type "Beaumont Texas" in Google, I am presented with a listing of nearly 7 million web links containing the term "Beaumont Texas ," with some rank ordering placing the most popular results near the top of the display. If I type "Beaumont Texas" in the search box on WolframAlpha <http://www.wolframalpha.com>, it directly displays the facts about the topic. In this case, WolframAlpha displayed the population, map, current local time and weather, cost of living index, median home price, unemployment rate, sale tax rate, crime rate, commute time, geographic information, links to the county and nearby cities, and a hyperlinked list of famous people born in Beaumont.

WolframAlpha displays a lot more than just text, as it is a powerful computational engine. There is an entire menu consisting of hundreds of sample inquiry topics at <http://www.wolframalpha.com/examples>, and some other suggestions in the margins of several of the pages that the user can utilize to practice on the system, and master some of its powerful features. One of the suggested sample ideas is to enter the user's date of birth; I entered mine and was presented with a lot of information about my birthday. The results showed my age in years, weeks, and days; holidays and observances that are held on my birthday; historical events that occurred on that day (not necessarily in the same year) and a listing of celebrity and historical figures who were born or died on that day. Other information is displayed about the selected date, including the moon phase on the day I was born. By entering one or more stock symbols, a wealth of information is displayed. As a test, I entered the symbol "VZ" for Verizon, and was presented with current price information, financial fundamentals, dividend and yield, historical returns, a large variety of charts, performance comparisons between Verizon and it competitors, histograms, and other detailed information about the company.

WolframAlpha is one of the handiest and most informative calculators available. Using the example "$250 + 15%" displays both the result ($287.50) and how it was calculated; this could be a great tool for teaching basic

arithmetic. Mathematical formulae are computed with ease, displaying detailed results of the computation. Using the digital term " $x^2 \sin(x)$ " (x squared times sine of x) displays graphical plots on various scales, alternate forms of the mathematical expression, roots, derivatives, and other functions.

Math and simple facts are not the only computational capabilities of this excellent service; it also has hundreds of other forms of information that can be calculated and displayed. Other areas in which WolframAlpha can provide extensive information are statistics and data analysis, physics, chemistry, engineering, astronomy, earth and life sciences, money and finance, dates and times, places and geography, socioeconomic data, weather, health and medicine, food and nutrition, sports and games, music, and many other topics. Users of my weather page sometimes ask me for historical weather information, usually for a specific date and location; as a default, WolframAlpha uses the location of the computer requesting the information, which is in my case, Beaumont. I simply entered "weather summer 2008" (for other locations enter the city or other geographic information), and was presented with time and temperature ranges, humidity, graphs showing meteorological information, and information about the weather stations that gathered the information presented. I picked this particular search to display the effects of Hurricane Ike, such as the wind speed and barometric pressure, which conspicuously stand out on the graphs. Using the hurricane template under the topics menu, the user is presented with detailed information on a particular storm, wind speeds, and

comparisons. Using the comparison feature, I compared Rita to Ike by entering the search term, "Hurricane Ike, Hurricane Rita ," and was presented with a table comparing those two local disasters. Rita was the stronger storm, but according to the composite tracking chart displayed, both had nearly identical tracks.

The amount of computational knowledge available from WolframAlpha is almost endless. If the user needs to calculate monthly payments and an amortization table, this can do it. If an investor needs commodity and futures prices, WolframAlpha provides that information in detail. Mortgage terms can be directly compared; by searching with the expression, "mortgage $150,000, 6.5%, 30 years" produces charts and graphs that display the monthly payments, graphical comparison of principle and interest over time, and other information. Present values, currency conversions, bond evaluations, different forms of options and derivatives, salaries, wages, income taxes, sales taxes, and historical financial information are easy to determine with WolframAlpha. In the economics classes that I teach every semester, the students are asked to calculate what has happened to prices over their lifetimes, and what may happen to prices when they are ready to retire. Using this engine the students can instantly calculate the current value of a historical quantity of money ($1000 in 1965 is worth what today?), compute historical equivalent value of today's money ($1000 today compared to 1980), and convert one historical quantity of money to another ($1000 in 1945 was worth what in 1990?).

While WolframAlpha is accessible from any Internet browser, it is also accessible using other means, without a browser, or as a browser plug-in to automate the computational process. From the website at <http://www.wolframalpha.com/downloads.html>, the user can put a gadget, widget, or deskband on his desktop (Mac OS X, Vista and Windows 7) to enable him to access information directly from his desktop. WolframAlpha toolbars are available for Internet Explorer, Chrome, and Firefox which enable searching from the browser toolbar. Firefox and IE8 users can add WolframAlpha as a search engine add-on, automating the search function from the browser menu. Apps (applications) are available for the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch that enable users of those devices to directly access the capacity of this service. Regardless of how accessed, the massive capabilities of WolframAlpha are readily available.

Now that I have had some experience with WolframAlpha, I will be more likely to use it to acquire information and calculate data, and less likely to use the traditional search engines such as Google when I need to find something. WolframAlpha is one of those services that I did not originally know that I needed, but now I cannot do without it.

WEBSITES:
<http://www.wolframalpha.com>.
<http://www.wolframalpha.com/examples/>.
<http://www.wolframalpha.com/screencast/introducingwolframalpha.html>.
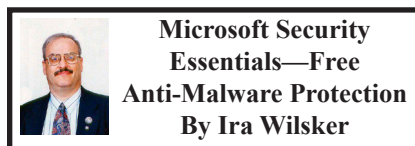<http://www.wolframalpha.com/about.html>.

<http://www.wolframalpha.com/downloads.html>.

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Microsoft Security Essentials—Free Anti-Malware Protection By Ira Wilsker

I recently encountered a situation where one of my computers was unable to load a new beta (pre-release) version of one of the popular security software suites that I was beta testing. The purpose of beta testing is to find serious bugs and other problems before the software is officially released. I have been a beta tester for dozens of titles over the years, and am fully cognizant of the problems and risks of beta testing. While the software publisher's beta support team has not yet resolved my issue, which was repeatable, this particular computer was now lacking any security software, and was at risk while performing normal online and offline tasks. I could have reinstalled my previous security suite, which has proven itself as reliable and effective, but I decided that this would be a good opportunity to try something new. There are a lot of security utilities available, both commercial and free, so I decided to try one of the few free products that I had not tried on one of my personal computers. I decided to try Microsoft's Security Essentials.

Microsoft had sold online and through retail channels its previous security product, Windows Live OneCare, which was met with mixed

reviews regarding its level of protection and performance. In late 2008 Microsoft announced that it would discontinue Windows Live OneCare on June 30, 2009, and replace it with a new offering code named "Morro." "Morro" was released in its final version in 2009 for free distribution and download as Microsoft Security Essentials. This product is available for download directly from Microsoft at <http://www.microsoft.com/Security_Essentials>. As is common with almost all other Microsoft services, Microsoft will digitally determine the validity of the Windows installed on the computer before allowing the download; this process only takes a few seconds. Security Essentials will run on almost any Windows computer with a genuine copy of XP (Service Pack 2 or SP3), Vista (Service Pack 1 of SP2), or Windows 7. Versions are available for either 32-bit or 64-bit operating systems. Since Security Essentials is an integrated anti-malware product that protects from both viruses and spyware, it will disable Windows Defender (Microsoft's dedicated anti-spyware utility) if Defender is already installed on the computer. Unlike other competitive security suites, Security Essentials does not include a firewall, but instead activates Window's integral firewall, and works with it. Also, since this is an "Essentials" utility that only provides malware protection, it does not include most of the other enhancements incorporated into the commercial products, such as anti-spam, website protection, and other tools. Security Essentials is ICSA Labs certified, and has been awarded the VB 100 Virus label, meaning that it detected 100% of the threats in a standardized testing

environment. This is important as it indicates that Security Essentials does an acceptable job in protecting systems from malware.

Downloading Security Essentials directly from Microsoft was very fast, the 64-bit version only being about 7MB in size. Installing it was simple, but it did recognize that I had some other security software on the computer, and directed me to uninstall the other software before installing it. Once I uninstalled the other security software that it identified, Security Essentials installed very quickly, and did not present any complicated configuration questions. After installing the program, it asked to perform an update, and then completed a quick scan of my hard drive. The scan was very fast, among the quickest that I have experienced, a plus for Security Essentials.

The interface for Security Essentials is clean, with few options available. The "Home" screen shows if the real-time protection is on, and if the signature files are up to date. Also on the Home screen are buttons for a quick, full or custom scan. The "Update" screen shows the date and time that the definitions were created, as well as virus definition and spyware definition version numbers. The "History" screen shows threats that were detected, quarantined, or allowed. Under the "Settings" tab, the screen shows the scheduled scans, file exclusions, some simple "Advanced" settings, and an ominous selection "Microsoft SpyNet." Microsoft SpyNet is an online community that helps the user respond to threats. By default, Security Essentials sends basic information to Microsoft about any possible malware that was detected. One interesting statement on the SpyNet setting says, "In some

instances, personal information might unintentionally be sent to Microsoft. Microsoft will not use this information to identify you or to contact you." The "Advanced membership" is basically the same, but sends additional software information to Microsoft.

One setting that is missing in Security Essentials that is on almost all other security products, is some type of setting to determine how often the software should "phone home" to check for updates. Microsoft says that it automatically updates, but does not indicate any standardized frequency of updates. My former security suite by default checked for updates every hour, and another product that I have used "pushes" almost continuous updates to the user, keeping them reasonably up to date. By contrast, Security Essentials has an apparently unpredictable update pattern, such that today I received a warning on the task bar icon, which flashed red; clicking on the icon told me that my definition files (virus signature files) may be out of date. Looking at the "Update" tab on the program showed that my files were two days out of date, so I manually updated the software by clicking on the "update" button. The update was quickly downloaded and installed, but it was interesting to note that the time stamp on the latest update was about six hours old. As I type this, the "Update" screen shows that my definitions are over 10 hours old, so I just clicked on the update button again; Security essentials duly checked for an update, and reported that my software is up-to-date, but still shows the 10 hour old definitions as being the latest. Several years ago, daily updates were the industry norm, but today, with thousands of new threats appearing daily, infrequent updates may indicate a potential weakness in system defenses, as competitive software would have already been updated several times today.

One very pleasant surprise with Security Essentials is how fast it loads at boot, and how little it degrades system performance. I use a software utility called Soluto to monitor and control my boot process; using my prior security suite, boot time was about 100 seconds, but with Security Essentials, my computer is booting in about 50 seconds, or twice as fast! Likewise, programs seem to load much faster with Security Essentials than my previous product, and browser performance is greatly improved as well, with web pages loading much faster. This may be explained by the fact that since Security Essentials is precisely what its name implies, only the basic essentials load; other overhead is not loading and running like the more comprehensive competitive security suites.

It is up to the user to decide if the minimal but adequate protection provided by the free Microsoft Security Essentials is worth the significant improvements in performance that it allows. Since my personal choice is to have increased protection, even at the cost of some performance degradation, I will go back to my favorite comprehensive commercial suite as soon as the beta issues are resolved, or the final version is released. Still, in the meantime, I will stay with Microsoft Security Essentials until that time

WEBSITE:
<http://www.microsoft.com/Security_Essentials>.

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Of Interest Links (OIL)
Fred Acerri

Apple: iPhone 4 drops more calls than iPhone 3GS.
<http://www.physorg.com/news198571446.html>.
Bouncing beads outwit Feynman:
<http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/60184/title/Bouncing_beads_outwit_Feynman>.
NASA and Microsoft Provide Mars 3-D Close Encounter:
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/07/100713122652.htm>.
New Research Can Spot Cloud Computing Problems Before They Start
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/07/100712102818.htm>.
The brain of the fly -- a high-speed computer
<http://www.mpg.de/english/illustrationsDocumentation/documentation/pressReleases/2010/pressRelease20100708/>.

Counting Cells With Specific Characters
By Sharon Parq Associates

Let's say that you have a Microsoft Excel worksheet that contains all the people who have ever worked in your department. Each name is prefaced by a single character that indicates the status of the person. For instance, if Fred Davis were retired, his name might show up as "RFred Davis ." With quite a lot of these names in the worksheet, you may need a way to count those people with a specific status character.

The easiest way to accomplish this is to use the COUNTIF function. If, for instance, the status character is the letter R (for "retired"), and your range of names is in cells A5:A52, then you could use the following to determine which cells begin with the letter R:
=COUNTIF(A5:A52,"R*")

The formula works because the comparison value is R*, which means "the letter R followed by any other characters." Excel dutifully returns the count. To search for a different status character, simply replace R with the desired status character.

Obviously, if the asterisk has a special meaning in this usage, you can't search directly for an asterisk. Actually, there are three characters you cannot search for directly: the asterisk (*), the question mark (?) and the tilde (~). If you want to search for any of these characters, you must precede the character with the tilde. Thus, if you wanted to determine a count of names that had a question mark as a status code, you could use the following:
=COUNTIF(A5:A52,"~?*")

An alternative to using COUNTIF is to create an array formula that is applied to every cell in the range. The following will do the trick very nicely:
=SUM((LEFT(A5:A52,1)="R")*1)

This must, of course, be entered as an array formula. This means that instead of pressing Enter at the

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Workaround Cartoon

From: <http://XKCD.com/763>.
Courtesy of Randall Munroe

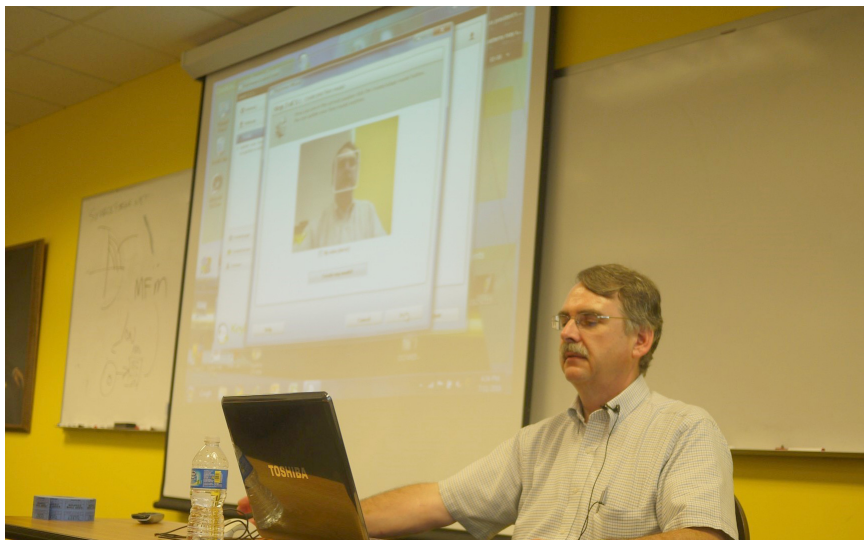**(Above): Mike Bader, Tom Callow, Carol Sanzi, Bob Clyne prepare for the meeting. (Below): Mike Bader with Donald Tillman of "Safe Data."**

(Above): Donald Tillman of "Safe Data" talks about Virtual Machines and secure destruction of data. (Below): Members during the break.

SEMCO Meeting Pictures

(Above): Tom Callow demonstrates "KeyLemon" for facial recognition. (Below) Post-meeting supper at Shield's with Donald Tillman and Gracie Tillman.

Board Members Present
President Mike Bader, Vice President Richard Jackson, Treasurer Bette Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-IBM Chairman Tom Callow, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, Publications Committee Chairman Warner Mach, and Members-at-Large Bob Clyne and Ron Green. Also present were past president Gary DeNise, presenter Donald Tillman and wife Gracie Tillman. Arriving late was SIG-Linux Chairman Michael Rudas. The board meeting was called to order at 12:20 p.m.

Old Business
Bette Gay reported that the current treasury amount equaled a total of $9,691.59 with $4,950.40 in the checking account and $4,741.19 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. The membership currently is 79. It is time for Gerry Delong, Jehana Jalil, and Edward Zaremba to renew their membership.

Bob Clyne moved to refund the newly renewed SEMCO membership to Mrs. Hertz as her husband, Dr. Phillip Hertz just passed away. Ron Green seconded the motion and it was carried.

New Business
Ron Green moved to create a Volunteer Committee with himself as chairman. Tom Callow seconded the motion and it was carried. A discussion took place as to the duties of this committee, which may include having a greeter at the monthly meetings.

Warner Mach reported that the Planning Session was successful. Ron Green introduced the group to the social network, Meetup. Warner Mach researched the cost of joining <http://www.meetup.com>. A six-month period would cost $72. Ron Green moved to establish a Meetup account for six months to see if it attracts new members. Mike Bader seconded the motion and it was carried.

Mike Rudas is setting up a Face Book account for SEMCO. He will monitor it. Mike Rudas also volunteered to be a "fall-back" presenter for the Sunday meetings.

Tom Callow moved to adjourn. Ron Green seconded the motion. The motion was carried. The meeting was adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

SEMCO

Serving the needs of professionals, hobbyists, novices, and prospective computer users since 1976.

* Learn more about computing in an informal, non-academic setting.
* Get honest answers to computer questions without commercial bias.
* Meet and interact with other computer users. Personal and electronic networking.
* Gain access to members willing to provide help in response to a phone call or e-mail
* Receive monthly newsletter with informative articles.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)

SIG-IBM
Tom Callow

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Paul DeAthos

August 8: 1:45 p.m.: GIMP: Wesley Arnold, retired professional photographer, will discuss the use of "GIMP," a free public-domain photo editor: Fix lighting, correct backgrounds, resize images, etc.

August 8: 3:45 p.m.: Windows Utilities: Maintaining Your Computer: Tom Callow will demonstrate several free utilities designed to help you keep Windows clean, lean and reliable.

SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

SIG-LINUX
Michael Rudas

August 24 (4th Tues): 5 p.m.: At the Madison Heights Fire Department; located at 31313 Brush (near 13 Mile & John R). Meet in Administration Section of building. Park in lot south of building. Enter through glass door on south side. Topic: Wide ranging discussion of computers and computing.

August 24 (4th Tues): 7 p.m.: At the Madison Heights Fire Department; located at 31313 Brush (near 13 Mile & John R). Meet in Administration Section of building. Park in lot south of building. Enter through glass door on south side. Topic: General discussion.

Sept. 2010 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after 2nd Sunday in month)
SEMCO Input and Members' Ads—Deadline: Sun. August 15, 11:59 p.m.
Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use Editor address on Page 2; e-mail address: <warnermach@gmail.com>. PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline.
Business Ads - Deadline: Second Friday monthly. Contact Editor (address Page 2)**.**

Warner Mach
warnermach@gmail.com
(to post monthly computer group info)

**CALENDAR-OF-EVENTS
OTHER GROUPS**

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron

Sept. 1, 7 p.m., (1st Wednesday) Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187 or Pam Raisanen E-mail info: <compinfo@greatlakes.net>. Web: <http://www.bwcomp.org>. Topic: "Microsoft Office 2010."

Focus: Hope IT User Group

Aug. 7, 9:30-11:30 a.m., 1400 Oakman, Detroit, MI. 48238. Web info <http://www.fhitug.org/>. Topic: "Lights, Cameras, Webcasts!"

HUG (Holly User Group)

Sept. 18, 9:00 a.m.; Groveland Twp. Fire Hall, 3085 Grange Hall Rd. & Dixie Hwy., Holly, MI. 48442. Topic: "What is SQL Server 2008 R2 and Why Do IT Professionals Care?"

MacGroup- Detroit

Aug. 22, 3:00 p.m., Birmingham Temple, 28611 West 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills. Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 248-569-4933. <http://www.macgroup.org>. Topic: "24th Anniversary Celebration - Mac Tips and Tricks." SIGS: 2:00 p.m.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

Aug. 21, (3rd Saturday); See web site for meeting time and location. <http://www.mactechnics.org>). JoAnn Olson at 248-478-4300.

MDLUG (Metro Detroit Linux User Group)

Aug. 14, 12:30–2:30 p.m., (2nd Saturday); MDLUG meetings will be at The Gaudior Academy located at 27100 Avondale Avenue in Inkster. Web: <http://www.mdlug.org>. Topic: TBA.

MUG (Michigan User Group)

Aug. 10, 6:00 p.m., (2nd Tuesday): MUG meetings are at The Farmington Community Library–Main Branch, 32737 W. 12 Mile Rd., Farminton Hills, MI. 48334. <http://www.mug.org>.Topic: TBA.

Michigan Apple Computer User Group

Aug. 12, 7:30 p.m., (2nd Thur.); Westview Office Park, 26100 American Dr., Suite 100, Southfield MI. 48034. Avi Drissman 248-232-7865. Web: <http://www.themichiganapple.com>. Topic: TBA.

Oak Park Computer Club

Every Fri., 10:15 a.m. at Oak Park Library, Oak Park Blvd. west of Coolidge.

Royal Oak Computer Club

Every Wed., 12:30 to 2:30 PM at Mahany/Meininger Senior Community Center, 3500 Marais Ave., Royal Oak, 48073. Near Crooks & 13 Mile. Guest speakers & regular monthly speakers. <http://tinyurl.com/royaloakcc>.

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)

Sept. 7, 7:30 p.m.(1st Tues); Macomb Community College South Campus, Bldg. K, 14500 E. 12 Mile Rd. Don VanSyckel <Don@VanSyckel.net>, 586-731-9232; Web: <http://www.SterlingHeightsComputerClub.org>. Topic: "Backup, Issues and Techniques." No summer meetings.

end of the formula, you would press Shift+Ctrl+Enter. The formula checks the left-most character of a cell, returning the value TRUE if it is R or FALSE if it is not. The multiplication is done to convert the TRUE/FALSE value to a number, either 1 for TRUE or 0 for FALSE. The SUM function returns the sum, or count, of all the cells that meet the criteria.

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JULY REFRESHMENT DONORS
Coordinator: Gary DeNise
Donors:
Bob Clyne
Jerry Comptois
Gary DeNise
Warner Mach
Carol Sanzi

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	**MS Word:** Clyne
Genealogy: Cook	**Networking:** Callow
IBM PC Hardware Issues: Clyne, Yuhasz	**Novell Netware:** Yuhasz
Operating Systems: Callow, Clyne, Yuhasz	**Quicken:** Clyne
MAC Hardware and OS Issues: Yuhasz	**Geocaching:** Cook
Security: Bader	**Relational Database Programming**: Lis

Bader, Mike—586-573-7330, 9am–8pm................... mdbader@flash.net
Callow, Tom—248-642-5770, 9am–5pm.................. tcallow@monaghanpc.com
Clyne, Bob—810-387-3101, 9am–10pm .... clyne@mich.com
Comptois, Jerry—248-651-2504, anytime
Cook, Stephen—313-272-7594, eves........................ scook48227@ameritech.net
Lis, Bernie—248-669-0101, 10am-8pm .... BerlLis@comcast.net
Vander-Schrier, Jack—586-739-7720,12–8pm ....jvanders@comcast.net
Yuhasz, Steve...Help@yuhasz.org

SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.

SEMCO CALENDAR

Engineering Society of Detroit
20700 Civic Center Dr., Suite 450, 4th Floor
Southfield, MI. 48076

August 8–SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

SEMCO Board Meeting at 12:00 noon. For Officers and SIG Chairpersons. Other members are invited to attend.

SEMCO General Meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM, 1:45 p.m., GIMP: Wesley Arnold, retired professional photographer, will discuss the use of "GIMP," a free public-domain photo editor: Fix lighting, correct backgrounds, resize images, etc

SOCIAL PERIOD 3:15 p.m. Refreshments! (Reminder: We must continue to maintain a neat environment.)

SIG-IBM Intermediate, 3:45 p.m., Windows Utilities: Maintaining Your Computer: Tom Callow will demonstrate several free utilities designed to help you keep Windows clean, lean and reliable.

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SIG-LINUX , August 24 (4th Tues): 7 p.m.: At the Madison Heights Fire Department; located at 31313 Brush (near 13 Mile & John R). Meet in Administration Section of building. Park in lot south of building. Enter through glass door on south side Topic: General discussion.

September 12–SEMCO Sunday

http://www.semco.org

PUBLIC INVITED

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

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SEMCO Meetings at [Engineering Society of Detroit](#)
20700 Civic Center Drive, Suite 450, 4th Floor
Southfield MI 48076

From I-696 exit at Evergreen. Take Evergreen south to Civic Center Drive. Civic Center Drive is about halfway between I-696/Eleven Mile Rd. and 10 Mile Rd. Turn west, right if you are coming from the north, onto Civic Center Drive. Follow Civic Center Drive, watching the number signs on the right. When you get to the 20700 sign turn right, north, and follow the drive until you arrive at the southwest corner of the brown building with the Engineering Society of Detroit sign near the top. Turn right, east, and go past the front of the building. When you reach the end of the building, turn left, north and go to the back of the building and turn left, west, again. The parking lot will be on your right. The entrance is in the center of the building. Park in back of building. Enter the rear door. The ESD office is on the fourth floor.

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

SEMCO (future meetings)
August 8
September 12

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