

# New Style



Newsletter of the LaCrosse PC Users' Group

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March 2002

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## This month's meeting

March 27, 7:00 PM

Gundersen Lutheran, Overholt Auditorium

## Why Digital will fail and what we can do about it"

presented by John Sarnowski

The following comes from Jack Storlie and the City of La Crosse Housing Authority:

## Volunteer Opportunities, in our High-Rises"

Computer Monitor:

This is brand new volunteer position. In two of our High-Rises, we have put in computers for our tenants to use. Unfortunately, many of our tenants are not yet comfortable with computers and many have never had any type of computer training. The Resident Service Department has tried promoting computer classes and/or training sessions in the past, however, participation was low.

We are hoping to offer something new and less threatening. As a Computer Monitor, we would like you to be there for support, answer basic questions and helping them learn and feel comfortable with the computer.

The Computer Monitor needs to be knowledgeable with computers and have lots of patience. The Computer Monitor may sign up for times that work for them, with at least one hour blocks of time (mornings, afternoons or evenings, any day of the week).

The Computer Monitor may bring homework, newspaper, needlework etc., to do when or if no one needs your help.

When someone wants your assistance we want you to devote your time and attention on him or her. We do have a staff member that takes care of the hardware and maintenance.

## XP means Extra People!

Carol Frank, secretary

The February meeting had a good turn out of visitors because of the large (and expensive!) advertisement in Saturday's Tribune. There were fifteen new people. We at the LCPC hope to see all of you again in March.

Marian had some Microsoft developers' software information to give away. Those of us who are into software development are free to take this. She also will get the Alpha File database software for review soon. Robin Alexander and Ernesto Brauer are interested in this.

One of the problems discussed was presented by Dick Dahlby. He has a problem with McAfee virus checker. He had a message to update his virus checker and ended up having to download the latest version. But while downloading it would get "hung up", start over and then cause Windows to "freeze up". Had to use Cntrl, Alt, Delete to get the partially loaded program off.

Advice from McAfee was to uninstall then reinstall the virus checker. Dick can't get a complete uninstall.

Chuck advised to

1. Uninstall from Control Panel/ Add-remove Programs
2. Delete C:\Program File\McAfee

3. Delete C:\Program File\Common files
4. Reinstall
5. Make sure path is correct

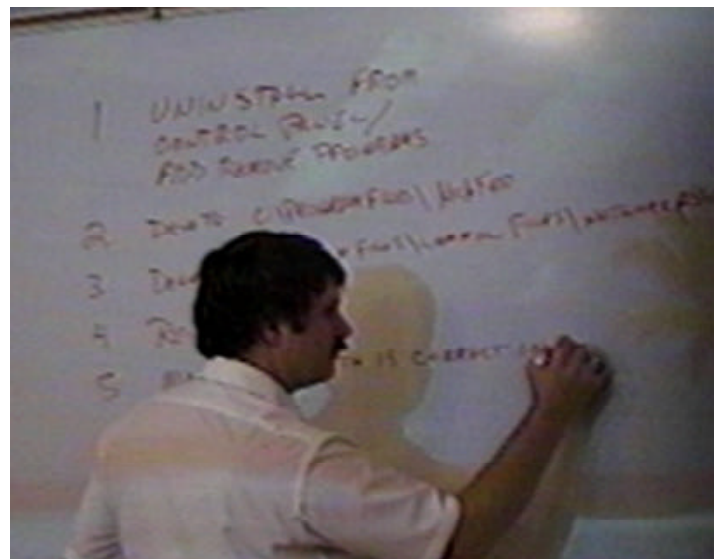
Chuck had a warning about Boot Scan. It can lock up computers. This is solved by deleting the word "Boot" to "Scan". Sometimes there is an incomplete path.

Another question was during installation does XP automatically detect everything like Outlook address files and keeps it. Shane says that this will be OK, but always make a backup of important files. He had the misfortune of installing XP when the power went off which really messed things up.

Chuck also suggests that if deciding to upgrade to XP, Microsoft has a program that can scan your system for program compatibility with XP. There is also a hardware compatibility list, check it carefully! Some hard-

*Continued on page 2*

*Chuck writing out his advice to Dick*



Visit our homepage at <http://www.lcpconline.com>

## Treasurers and Membership Report February 2002

Dick Dahlby, Treasurer

Income received in February was \$40.00 from one membership renewal (Shane Lambert), and one new member (Larry Nagy). Thanks Shane for your continued interest and support, and welcome Larry to LCPC. (See Larry's 'Bio' in the Meet our New Member column.)

Expenses paid in February and March were: \$9.50 for 30 photocopies of the February LCPC Newsletter, and \$201.92 for the LCPC article in the La Crosse Tribune.

The LCPC checking account balance as of 03/13/2002 is \$775.58.

We presently have 54 enrolled members in LCPC.

Members whose annual renewal fees (dues) are presently past due are: (Dec.) Bill Brockmiller, (Jan.) Kathryn Urban, and (Feb.) Arlene Bacon.

Membership renewals due in March are: Alvin and Monica Fritz, Karen Kesselring, David Madson, Chuck Whalen, and Jim and Sandy Wheat.

Renewals due in April are: Kevin Blum, Joseph Doucet, George Frisch, and Kathleen Ann Gallagher.

Annual dues are \$20, and checks should be made payable to La Crosse PC Users Group. Dues may be mailed to either of the following addresses, or may be paid to me in person at the March 27th meeting.

La Crosse PC Users Group  
Dick Dahlby  
P.O. Box 2991

La Crosse, WI 54601-2991  
or 501 Olivet St

La Crosse, WI 54603-1318

We had thirteen visitors/guests sign-in at the February meeting. Hopefully some will become members in the future.

Attention all members: Remember, if you change your email address, it is very important to inform LCPC of the change, so that the Membership ListServ (membersonly@lcpconline.com) can be changed accordingly. To do so, please send me an email with your new email address and I will see that the ListServ is changed. If you haven't received an email from the ListServ within the last two weeks, please let me know that also, so that I can check on it. Thank you.

Dick Dahlby [ddahlby@cs.com](mailto:ddahlby@cs.com)

*Windows XP continued from page 1*

ware you may currently own may not work under XP. As a general rule anything with a parallel port older than two years won't work, like scanners and graphic tablets.

Shane Lambert gave the presentation about XP.

He spends about eighty hours a week on his computers, both at work and at home. All five of his computers have XP.

Windows XP is the best version of Windows ever. He has never crashed it yet, despite trying his best to do so. However, XP is expensive and the installation CD only allows two installations. If for some reason another installation is needed, Microsoft needs to be called at a toll number and give permission for more installations.

So far the only problems he has are with Marian's Extended Memory problem and he can't automatically dial up to his service provider with Netscape. He can do it automatically with AOL and Internet Explorer.

In his opinion XP is easier to use. The desktop doesn't look that much different but the Start Menu has more information. Your most important programs can be "pinned" to the desktop and your most used programs appear at the top of the list, under the "pinned" items. The number of programs you want to show at once can be set. If you don't like the new Start Menu, click on Properties and use the "Classic" style Start Menu.

The Control Panel can also be reset. The new way of displaying the Control Panel is supposed to be easier and more intuitive. But like the Start Menu, there is the option to have it display in the "Classic" style.

Windows Update can check the Microsoft site while on-line to see if any updated files are needed. A little yellow box will appear saying that updates are available, click to see what they are. By default, Windows Update is set up to be automatic. Shane recommends not to

## Meet our New Member

Dick Dahlby, Membership

Following is a brief "bio" from Larry Nagy ([LARRYNAGY@centurytel.net](mailto:LARRYNAGY@centurytel.net)). Larry joined at the February meeting. Welcome Larry.

I have retired after spending my entire working life as a broadcast engineer. Born and raised in New Jersey, I started at a factory building broadcast studio equipment and then moved into working at radio stations in New Jersey and Ohio. My wife and I moved to Wisconsin 35 years ago where I have worked at both radio and TV stations as a broadcast engineer.

My computer is an Acer with Windows 95, purchased 5 years ago. I am self-taught, and use my computer for word processing, and during the last 2 years, paperwork while I was self-employed. If you enjoyed last year's Onalaska fireworks show, I directed it after designing it on my computer using 3 spreadsheets, word processor and a trial CAD program.

At the next meeting I will tell about crashing my computer and the help I need to clean out part of some old files, and how Norton Internet Security prevented me from using Internet Explorer. It was the day after a virus was to strike on Wednesday the 6th.



*Windows XP new Start menu*

*concludes on page 3*

*Windows XP continued*

Auto update. If an update is new that day, wait at least five days before downloading to give a chance for any bugs in the update to be taken care of.

The Task Bar is locked by default. No more moving task bars when guest users are on the computer. Icons can also be hid on the Task Bar.

Only the ones being currently used will show up. This will give more room for open windows on the Task Bar. If multiple windows of the same program are open, they can be “stacked” on the Task Bar. This is another space saving feature. Just click and all document names appear in that stack. This is especially useful if there are lots of web pages from the same site open. The “Close Group” command can close all of the stacked windows at once. If desired the user can set it to do it the old way.

Some older programs will not run in XP, but there is the Windows 98 compatibility mode. Right click on Menu, Properties, select compatibility mode for Window 95 or 98.

Don't believe what's on the box for system requirements. A minimum of 256 Meg of RAM is needed for XP. Memory is cheap enough to have up to 512 MG RAM for about \$30 more. However, some

motherboards have a limit on how much memory can be added. Some new computers have only two memory banks, so get the largest memory chips possible.

Shane also demonstrated how to change users without logging off the first user. This uses more processing, of course. The first user can have programs running (like downloading from the internet) while the second user is using the computer. In the home version of XP all users are administrators. The office version has administrators and limited users. Limited users can't use the internet or CD burner.

Another neat feature is that up to four monitors can be used at once as a single monitor. Different files and programs can be opened and shown on different monitors. A video card is needed for each monitor. Some cards can have four monitor plug-ins. Be sure your video cards don't conflict with each other. Some games benefit from two screens, the action on one screen, the controls on another screen. Shane found this feature useful for Web editing and comparing picture files.

What does XP stand for? Shane called Microsoft and talked to some important people there. Officially, it doesn't have an official meaning. It's just XP.

*System Resources—Continued from page 7*

out my inbox, which contributed to the problem.

**Eudora**

In the end, because the latest Eudora upgrade doesn't solve the resource problem and costs as much as some other programs, I tried alternatives, and changed to Calypso, an excellent shareware mail program which uses about 5% of resources.

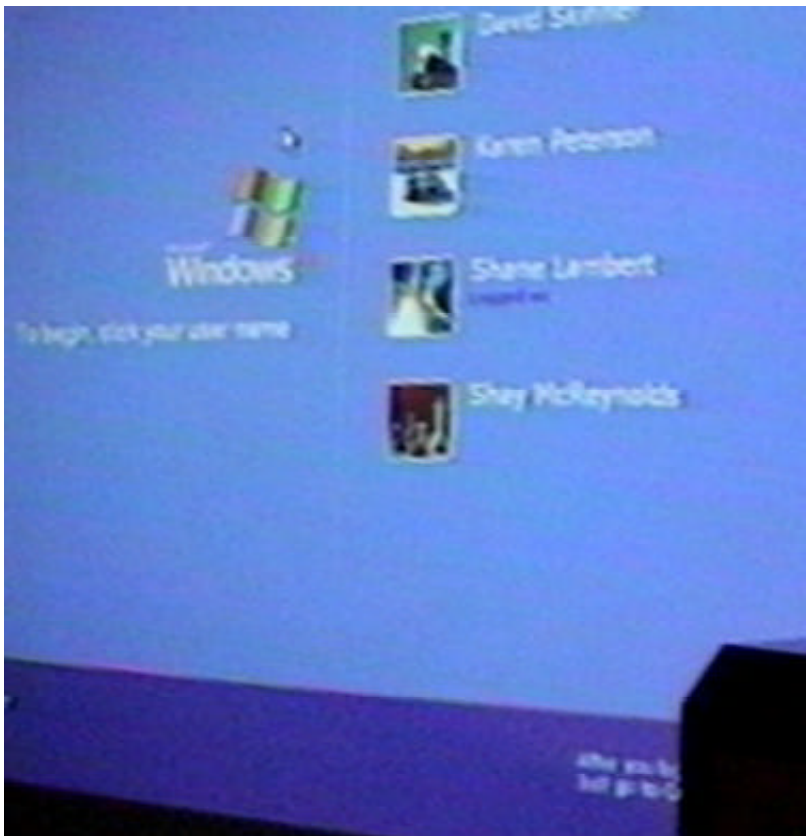
**Other problems and solutions**

Problems in Windows Itself—Finally, note that system resources are not always freed up when a program closes, due to apparently sloppy programming practices in Windows. Windows frequently puts off initializing things a program needs, like fonts, until they are requested. Once requested, those items stay available after the program is closed and the resources used by that item are not freed. Yes, this is the way they designed it. I suspect it's crude hack to make programs appear to load faster. With 16-bit applications (anything that will run in Windows 3.1 or DOS), none of the system resources used are freed up until all such programs are closed. Microsoft says this is for compatibility purposes. My guess is that it's laziness. Rather than program in a way to tell if the resource is still needed, Microsoft leaves it open. Microsoft also says that closing a program before it has a chance to completely start up can strand resources and reduce the level of free system resources.

If you're finding that you have regular problems with low system resources, as I have, first check the programs that are always running; then check the programs you use regularly.

Internet browsers are notorious for using and not freeing up system resources, but you might find that one browser works better for you than others. You can also try out replacements for your programs. For example, Calypso leaves me more free resources than Eudora Pro and offers better features in the bargain.

*This article originally appeared in **Sacra Blue**, the official magazine of the Sacramento PC Users Group and has been reprinted with permission. Tom Anderson makes his living doing database consulting but serves as Content Editor and Executive VP for the Sacramento PC Users Group. Contact Tom Anderson via e-mail at [tom.anderson@sacpcug.org](mailto:tom.anderson@sacpcug.org).*

*The alternative user screen*

# Finding your way among unknown files

Richard L. Eastline, reprinted from *Hard-Copy*, Journal of the Chicago Computer Society, April 2001

One problem with file formats is that there are too many of them, so here's how you can even the odds with help from **Conversions Plus Suite**

Suppose that someone told you of a marvelous computer product that would enable you to open almost any kind of file on disk whether a document or graphic - no matter that it be Windows, DOS, or Mac? More than that, you could view the contents in formats not present in your own system and then convert them to something that would allow for editing and saving? Or, write directly to Mac files on a PC? And, while we're at it, how about being able to readjust about every common (and even uncommon) e-mail attachment?

Quite likely some of you will assume such promises to be "blue sky" press releases for a yet-to-come Microsoft product while others may recognize them as capabilities within existing software titles. But fewer yet may know that every one of the named benefits reside in one program that is reasonably priced and readily available. Or maybe you have heard of it but didn't know of its full capabilities. Actually, it's a suite residing on one CD-ROM requiring less than 20MB of space.

There's a lot to talk about in describing **Conversions Plus (ver. 6.0)** from *DataViz*, so this report is divided into sections that correspond to the primary categories of available operations. The product has been put through its paces on a Pentium II computer, 400MHz cpu, running Win98.

## Summarizing the main features of this software

A sensible amending of the software title by the addition of "suite" tells that separately-sold titles have been combined. The *Conversion Plus* program for opening and converting files is joined by features of *DataViz* utilities that have been available as *Attachment Opener* and *MacOpener 2000*. The three relate well although their operating functions are independent. However, all of them are characterized by logical, almost intuitive actions on the part of the user. In making a summary statement, *DataViz* promises that "whether you receive files on a disk or attached to an e-mail, *Conversions Plus* allows you to convert and open these files in

your favorite programs, regardless of the programs in which they were created."

Version 6.0 of the main components appears to be an updating of translation capabilities in order to match the newer versions of popular Windows programs (including *Word 2000*, *WordPerfect 9.0*, *WordPro Millennium*, *Excel 2000*, *Quattro Pro 9.0*, *Lotus 1-2-3 Millennium*, *MS Works 4.5*, *WordPerfect Works 2.0*) as well as most Mac-based counterparts. The software is designed to provide similar capabilities when used with Win95, 98, 2000, ME, or NT 4.0 (only Intel-based).

## Opening files for use in matching applications

Right up front, let's emphasize an important procedure: *Conversions Plus* is designed to operate "peer to peer" in a sense. That means word processor to word processor, database to database, or graphic to graphic. You can open and edit such files within a Windows environment or crossover from the Mac platform to Windows. For instance, say that you receive a disk containing files for a proposal created in Corel *WordPerfect For Windows* and you want to incorporate some of the content into a document you're producing in the PC version of MS Word. Because the version of Word being used may not provide conversion from WP, by double-clicking on the file (or its icon) an "Open With" Windows box normally appears, listing what seems to be every program you have, asking that you choose one with which to open the "foreign" file. It's a guessing game on your part and in all likelihood you'll wind up with an Invalid File or similar notice. With *Conversions Plus* installed however, you would first double-click on the file. At that point the program would identify the file format, check the file extension (such as \*.wpd) and determine whether the file can be opened in a program already installed on your computer.

If it is openable, then a proprietary "open with" window will appear, listing only the program(s) that can be used. By selecting one, window will show the name of the program that created the file along with suggestions such as electing view-only.

## Describing the programs multiple operations

Viewing is just one of the key functions of this utility. The others are providing file information without opening and the namesake operation, multiple conversion services. (*MacOpener* gets involved with these functions, too, and will be discussed when applicable.)

**View:** When you are faced with opening a "foreign" file, your purpose may be only to view it and not necessarily convert it for editing or insertion into a document or graphic. In that case, right-click on the file, choose *Conversions Plus*, click the "View" option. The "File Viewer" window opens and shows the contents of the file with the formatting and other attributes intact. Also, in the View mode, it's possible to print the file in its entirety or whatever portion is selected.

Note: Viewing "foreign" files without converting also can be accomplished through use of *Quick View*, a utility included with *Windows*. It has more limited choices that *Conversions Plus*, *Quick View Plus* (a third-party software product from Inso), and also *Ontrack's PowerDesk 4 Pro*.

If the *MacOpener* utility has been installed, you'll be able to view files using Mac formats from a variety of media: floppy disks, SuperDisks, Zip disks *SyQuest* cartridges, and Mac CD-ROMs.

**File Info:** Whether or not you decide on opening the file, you still can obtain useful information about it through another feature of this program. Right-clicking on the file, choosing *Conversions Plus*, and then clicking on "File Info" brings up a window that shows (1) the name of the file in its native identification; (2) the format in which it exists, such as \*.rtf; (3) its size in bytes; and (4) its location drive, directory, and folder. This applies to both *Windows* and *Mac* file formats.

**Convert:** Here is the principal function of the program and it has, through its many evolutionary versions, now reached a point whereby the conversion process yields very comprehensive results. Understand first that every file converter uses two elements to execute translations: a Reader and a Writer. The former reads the file, identifying its components, while the latter makes use of this

*Continued on page 5*

*File Conversion—Continued from page 4*

retrieved information to create another file, usable in a different format.

Converting can be initiated by following the same procedure described above for viewing files or checking file information, except that this time you click on the “Convert” option. Alternatively, if you accessed the “View” or “File Info” window already, then click on the tool bar button marked “Convert.” You’ll then see a window that lists program formats in your system that are usable. Select the specific format you prefer to use for this conversion. Although a default name is listed for the new file, you can type in one of your own choosing. In either case the correct extension is added to the file name based on the format selected. Then, it’s just a matter of assigning a location for the converted file—either by browsing for an existing folder or creating a new one. A status notice will advise when the process has been completed and the file is ready for use.

How close will be the duplication? Depending on the attributes supported by the original file, the translated version will retain them all. Included are text characteristics such as bold, italics, small caps and all caps, underlining, subscripts and superscripts, color, expanding and condensing, tabs, indents, margins, line spacing, justification, and borders. Document attributes include page setup, headers and footers, numbering, bulleting, hard breaks, columns, tables, style sheets, hyperlinks, and for spreadsheets: row heights, column widths, split panes, embedded objects, and even 3-D.

Graphic files are handled the same as documents even though there are many more proprietary file formats and extensions. Conversions Plus supports the more common ones (.eps, .gif, .jpg, .tif, and .pic) and, generally, most graphics products allow for file saving in one or more of these. A special advantage of this program is allowing conversion of selected portions via cursor moves in a viewed file, such as an illustration from a grouping, or from a mixed page of artwork and type. For situations where there is a graphic within a file that is not supported directly by Conversions Plus, the program has a feature that allows image translation to and from the Windows Clipboard

## Working with media and files in Macintosh formats

As mentioned, the essential features of MacOpener are included in the Conversions Plus Suite. If you have regular involvement with graphics and multimedia projects, the capability to treat Mac and PC as if they were the same makes for exceptional convenience “Cross platform” sharing is possible by installing a Macintosh system driver that permits accessing any type of Mac disk from the Windows desktop, Explorer, or any PC program. Customarily, when files are moved to a PC from Mac media, some Mac specifying information can be lost. However, Conversions Plus is capable of preserving this information through a process it calls Extension Mapping. This is accomplished via a database of Mac file types and creators along with their corresponding PC extensions. (The combination of a file type and a creator plus an extension establishes the file format.) For any of the extensions in the database, as well as those you may add to it, you may choose to use the format in both directions: Mac to PC or PC to Mac, or in one direction only. The two-way feature can be particularly valuable to users who work with programs produced in both platforms, such as the series of Adobe software titles for publishing.

When a Mac disk is inserted in a PC, the “File Info” window described above will identify the Mac files by their native name and extension. For any file that is converted, the selected Windows or DOS extension is then added to the Mac file’s identification. When a PC file is to be copied to a Mac disk, you can leave the PC extension in place or remove it. Yes, Conversions Plus not only can read and convert Mac files for PC use, but can write PC files to Mac after formatting the disk directly on a PC. The program installs a Mac format command that is accessed by right-clicking the drive icon in My Computer, the drive’s listing in Windows Explorer, or by selecting it from the Conversions Plus program group in the Start menu. [There’s a program that is somewhat competitive to MacOpener, equally respected, called MacDrive 2000—not tested for this report. It’s from MediaFour and sells for the same price but isn’t available as part of an integrated suite.]

## Reading those strange e-mail attachments

Eventually, nearly everyone receives e-mail messages with attachments refusing to comply with an open command, yielding a screen filled with cryptic codes or something like engineering symbols. Very often there’s no response at all; the e-mail message just sits there. Once again, Conversions Plus to the rescue. The final component of the suite draws from the strengths of a program that DataViz had marketed separately as Attachment Opener. It complements the parent product well, bringing to e-mail a similar capacity to retrieve and to use transmitted files including those that may require decompression and decoding.

Several encoding formats are used for sending e-mail efficiently. The most common are identified as MIME, Binhex, uuEncode, and MacBinary. Depending on the e-mail program you use, one or more of these may be recognized. Those that aren’t supported cannot be decoded and wind up as “garbage.” Conversions Plus treats such files in the same manner as previously described for the viewing and opening of documents. In being able to recognize all of the most common formats, it’s possible for the program’s “Attachment Wizard” to retrieve files with formats unknown to your e-mail package. The steps are quick and simple. Choose the Wizard from the Conversions Plus program group in the Start menu, select the entire e-mail message and copy the text to Windows Clipboard. From a screen that shows the e-mail file(s), typically a document, choose the one(s) to be saved and the destination folder in which to place them. From there, you then can open the files if you have a compatible program or else convert them to a format that is usable.

The compressing of transmitted files likewise requires decompressing capability by the receiving program. Conversions Plus allows Attachment Opener to do this by recognizing commonly used “zip” formats, such as Zip, Gzip, and Z.

There are hundreds of software programs out there and a good many of them masquerade as much-needed utilities. But most of us don’t really need an “atomic” clock or a low-resources warning announced by a fire siren. On the list of the most useful tools available, and at reasonable cost, you definitely would have to include an anti-virus program, a clean-up/delete/uninstall utility, and automatic backup. In this writer’s opinion, you’d do well to add Conversions Plus to that group.

*Conversions Plus, ver. 6.01 Data viz, Inc. / 55 Corporate Drive, Trumbull, CT 06611; 1-800-733-0030 / info@dataviz.com. For Win 95, 98, 2000, ME, NT 4.0 / Requires up to 20MB of hard drive space for full suite / Listed price for the suite is \$70 but mail-in rebates of \$20 have been offered / MacOpener 2000 also sold separately as full-featured product for \$50.*

# Review-Powerquest Partition Magic 7.0

Carol Theodore, LACS, reprinted from *User Freindly*, the Journal of the Los Angeles Computer Society, January 2002

Partition Magic 7.0 is the latest partitioning software from PowerQuest. For those of you who are not familiar with partitioning software and partitioning in particular, here is a brief introduction. Before you can install an operating system on a fixed disk (harddrive), the drive must be partitioned. In Windows and DOS this means using the utility called Fdisk. Fdisk destroys any partitions on the hard drive. Therefore, if you want to change the size of a partition already created, Fdisk is not a good choice. Enter Partition Magic. This program allows you to resize, change, and combine partitions without destroying your data.

## Requirements

System requirements for Version 7.0 are a minimum of 54 MB of hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, 3.5 floppy drive. Minimum memory requirements for Windows 95/98, Windows Me, Windows NT 4.0 Workstation is 32 MB. For Windows 2000 Pro and Windows XP the minimum memory requirement is 64 MB. For Windows 95/98 you will need at least a 486 or compatible. For Windows Me you will need a Pentium 150 or greater (or compatible).

## Installation

I installed Partition Magic 7.0 on a Pentium 4/ 1.5 Ghz machine with 384 MB of 133 SDRAM and a 30 GB hard drive running Windows 98/SE. Installation was easy and started automatically when I put the CD in the drive. (This will occur only if you have auto-insert notification set.) I had Partition Magic 6.0 previously installed. Version 7.0 recognized that installation and asked me if I wanted to uninstall Version 6.0 to which I said yes. After Version 6.0 was uninstalled, installation of Version 7.0 started automatically. I chose the Custom installation option that allowed me to set a different directory and partition, and choose which features to install. I was prompted to make Rescue Disks and clicked "YES." I needed two formatted floppies The first floppy is a boot disk and

the second has the Partition Magic program information. These disks will run the program.

## Operation

I ran the program from Windows 98, although some operations were completed in DOS mode. This was done automatically after changes were applied.

The interface is very user friendly with helpful wizards for accomplishing some tasks. One of the most useful features of Partition Magic is resizing partitions. I resized one of my partitions in order to add more space to a swap partition I had created when the drive was set up initially. This operation was accomplished by selecting the partition I wanted to resize, choosing RESIZE from the menu and moving the slider to the appropriate amount of space I wanted to create.

Another useful feature allows the user to split a partition and move some files and folders to that new partition. This is a great feature if you purchased a computer with one large hard drive and one large partition. It is advisable to make more than one partition. I always create several partitions including a swap partition to avoid memory problems.

Using Partition Magic and Boot Magic (a separate installation on the Partition Magic CD), I was able to make a separate primary partition to install Windows 2000. I just ran

the Wizard for creating a new partition, installed Boot Magic and installed the new operating system. Boot Magic allows you to switch between the two primary partitions by hiding the inactive partition.

## Features that are new to this version:

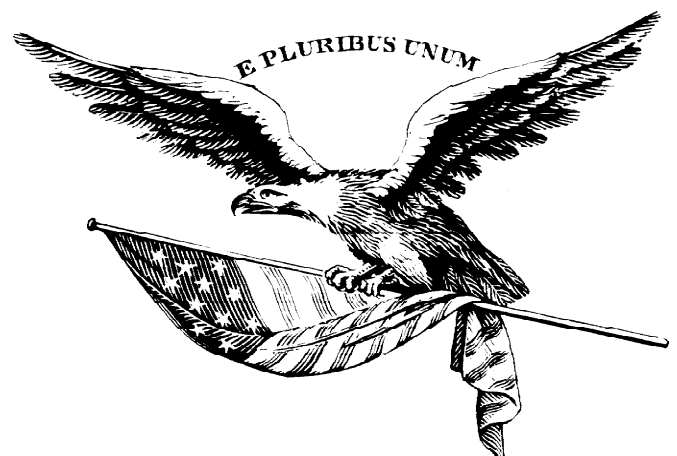
- ▶ Support for Hard Drives up to 80 GB
- ▶ Support for an external USB Hard Drive
- ▶ Splitting partitions below the root folder
- ▶ Merging NTFS (NT files system) partitions

## Summary

Partition Magic has always been a very useful program. This latest version works more smoothly and is more user-friendly than previous releases. Along with Drive Image, Partition Magic has been a part of my toolkit for a long time and will continue to be so.

Partition Magic 7.0, PowerQuest Corporation

P.O. Box 1911,  
Orem, Utah 84059-1911 USA  
801-437-4218  
[support@powerquest.com](mailto:support@powerquest.com)  
Street Price: \$70 .



# Freeing System Resources

Tom Anderson, Sacramento PC Users Group

You've probably gotten the warning from Windows: "Ninety percent or more of your system resources are in use. Close programs now or your computer will explode."

Your initial reaction, like mine, might have been, "I've got plenty of memory and hard drive space. What's going on?" Unfortunately, this somewhat cryptic message has very little to do with RAM and hard drive space. It refers to small areas of Windows memory that are used to keep track of open windows and other objects on the screen, like fonts, list boxes, timers, menus, and so forth. I learned far more about this subject than I wanted recently, when my system kept collapsing because the system resources kept disappearing. The Microsoft Web site (<http://support.microsoft.com/>) has surprisingly little on the topic, but a search in newsgroups and another at Google (<http://www.google.com/>) yielded the information I needed.

I was surprised, though, to find an astonishing amount of misinformation as well. Far too many references, on supposedly well-informed sites, referred to system resources as RAM, and recommended closing applications to free up more RAM. While closing applications can help system resources, the problem is not with RAM.

## What Causes the Problem

When Windows is running, what you see and do is built from a collection of objects that, together, make up the Windows experience. All these objects have to be tracked-their location in memory, their status (open, checked, maximized, etc.), their menus, and much more -so they can be displayed when necessary, closed, or restored without trampling over anything else in your Windows session. Windows 3.1 was notorious for running out of system resources. Windows 95 changed how these items are handled, and Windows 98 uses the same scheme.

## Technical discussion

Briefly, Windows has five areas, or "heaps," that store information about system resources. User32.dll, which manages user interface functions like window creation and messages, uses a 16-bit heap and two 32-bit

heaps. One of the 32-bit heaps stores a WND window structure for each window in the system. The other stores menus. The 16-bit heap stores message queues, windows classes, etc. GD132.dll, the graphical device interface, holds the functions for drawing graphic images and displaying text. It uses a 16-bit heap and a 32-bit heap.

## Why You Have a Problem

The point here is that this space is limited and everything you run on the computer uses some of it. When your system slows to a crawl, the odds are good that you have a system resources problem.

## Problem began

My problems with system resources began with an update to Eudora Pro, my e-mail program. (This falls under the heading "Free Updates Aren't Always a Good Idea.") It took me a while to realize that I had upgraded Eudora about the time the problems started.

When the light bulb lit, I went to a Eudora newsgroup to search for comments. Hint: it's easy to search for this kind of thing at Deja News ([www.deja.com/usenet](http://www.deja.com/usenet)). I quickly discovered complaints about the system resources used by Eudora, along with suggestions on increasing the resources available. A search on the Web turned up more suggestions. It quickly became clear that this is a common problem, since I found pages at Compaq, Adobe, PC Magazine, and other sites discussing how to cope.

## Solutions

In essence, there are three steps in dealing with this problem. First, you have to learn the extent of the problem. Windows 9x includes a tool, the Resource Meter, which shows the percentage of User, GDI, and System resources available (the system resource figure is a combination of the other two, although it always seems to match the lower of the other two numbers). Resource Meter is `rsrctr.exe` in the `C:\Windows` directory. You can open Windows Explorer, find the file, and drag it to your desktop to create a shortcut. In Win98, you can then drag it to the right side of the system tray to

have it run every time you boot up. (Note that this uses some resources, too.) This will give you a constant check. The icon changes colors as the resources change: green if you have plenty, yellow if you're getting low and red if you're in the danger zone.

With this icon in the system tray, you can start checking which programs use the resources. Start with a clean boot, then float your mouse pointer over the resource meter and note the resources available. If you're under 75%, it's a good idea to start checking your system.

## Check startup programs

Click on the Start button, then Run, and type in `msconfig.exe`. When the window opens, click on the Startup tab. You'll get a list of programs - the checked items run every time you boot your computer and usually put an icon in the system tray.

You should go through this list carefully and uncheck those you don't want or need. Many are added automatically when you install a program. Real Audio, for example, runs a program to help it start up quickly. Wordperfect adds several items to the tray when you install it. Virus programs and other utilities are usually running in the background. However, you might find programs you don't need, or that you no longer use. Sometimes you'll find duplicates, which are rarely necessary.

If you uncheck these programs one at a time, then reboot, you can see what each individual program uses. Once you've cleared out this list, reboot and check your resources again.

## Check Out Your Programs

Open a program, and when it's completely open, check the resources again. As you open more windows in the program, keep checking resources. You may be surprised at how much of your system is used. In my case, Eudora Pro was using 20% of my system resources, an astonishingly large amount. It turned out that Eudora opens the inbox, outbox and trash folders when it runs, and every message in these folders uses some resources. I have a bad habit of not cleaning

*Continued on page 3*

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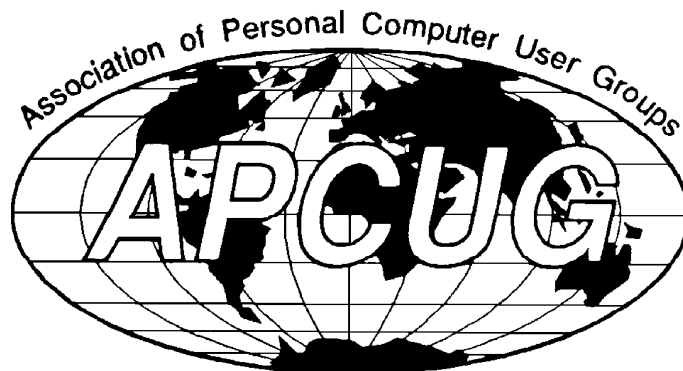
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