

# New Style



Newsletter of the La Crosse PC Users Group

Volume 23 Number 4

April 2003

## What's Inside

- ☑ Choosing a Digital Camera
- ☑ Digital Photography
- ☑ Foto Junkie
- ☑ States to Adopt OSS?

## April Meeting

April 30th, 7:00pm

Lutheran Hospital Overholt Auditorium

## La Crosse PC Users Group (LCPC)

Treasurer's and Membership Report - March 2003

*Dick Dahlby, Treasurer*

## Penguins and Computers

*An Introduction to Linux*

Presented by Shane Lambert  
La Crosse Linux Users Group

A Look at the GUI's

Games and Entertainment

Productivity and Utilities

## Why Penguins?

This email from Linus Torvalds in response to this very question seems to explain the significance of the Penguin:

Umm.. You don't have any gap to fill in.

"Linus likes penguins". That's it. There was even a headline on it in some Linux Journal some time ago (I was bitten by a Killer Penguin in Australia - I'm not kidding). Penguins are fun.

As to why use a penguin as a logo? No good reason, really. But a logo doesn't really have to mean anything - it's the association that counts. And I can think of many worse things than have linux being associated with penguins.

Having a penguin as a logo also gives more freedom to people wanting to use linux-related material: instead of being firmly fixed with a specific logo (the triangle, or just "Linux 2.0" or some other abstract thing), using something like a penguin gives people the chance to make modifications that are still recognizable.

So you can have a real live penguin on a CD cover, for example, and people will get the association. Or you can have a penguin that does something specific (a Penguin writing on wordperfect for the WP Linux CD, whatever - you get the idea).

Compare that to a more abstract logo (like the windows logo - it's not a bad logo in itself). You can't really do anything with a logo like that. It just "is".

Anyway, go to <http://www.isc.tamu.edu/~lewing/linux/> for some nice examples.

Income received in March and to-date in April, was \$100.00 from five membership renewals. They were: Don and Carol Frank Atkinson, Jack Storlie, Bill Brockmiller, Alvin and Monica Fritz, and Dave Madson. Thank you for your continued interest and support.

March expenses were: \$13.19 for 25 photocopies of the February edition of the LCPC Newsletter, and \$14.80 for postage stamps. April expenses to-date are \$75.00 for a booth at the April 24th 7 Rivers Technology Expo, and \$38.00 for annual renewal of our Post Office Box. The LCPC checking account balance as of 04/16/2003 is \$1,049.65.

We presently have 52 enrolled members in LCPC. Members whose annual membership renewal fees (dues) are presently past due are: (February) Larry Nagy, (March) Shane Lambert, and Chuck Whalen.

Membership renewals due in April are: Ken Birnbaum, Kevin Blum, Joe Doucet, George Frisch, Kathleen Ann Gallagher, Eldora Hohlfield, Jim Mayer, and Jean Troyanek.

Annual dues are \$20 (individual or couple), and checks should be made payable to La Crosse PC Users Group. Dues may be mailed to either of the following addresses, or paid to me at the April 30 meeting.

La Crosse PC Users Group	Dick Dahlby
P.O. Box 2991	501 Olivet St
La Crosse, WI 54601-2991	La Crosse, WI 54603-1318

Reminder to all members: If you become more than three (3) months delinquent in paying your membership dues, you will be subject to removal from the ListServ, and from LCPC. So please, be prompt with your renewal fees.

Also, if you change your email address, it is very important to inform LCPC of the change, so that the Membership ListServ can be changed accordingly. To do so, please send me an email with your new email address and I will make the change to the ListServ. 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.

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## Choosing a Digital Still Camera

*By Ira Wilsker*

Digital cameras have become one of the most popular new consumer items. As is common for many high technology items, the price of digital cameras has fallen, as the technology improves. The dramatic increase in sales of digital cameras is mostly due to their "instant gratification" by eliminating the cost and inconvenience of film and processing. Another advantage is the ease of editing digital photos. The increase in sales of digital cameras has often more than offset the decline in sales of film cameras and accessories. Also, digital photography has in some cases, replaced film photography in many professional applications. According to Olympus, one of the leading digital camera manufacturers, the high-end digital cameras are now used by many professional photographers for weddings and other events. Many newspapers and magazines are now employing digital photography, which bypasses the darkroom, and allows the input of images directly to editors. For home users, digital cameras range from very inexpensive point and shoot models to sophisticated models that rival 35mm SLR cameras, including accessory lenses and peripherals.

The potential resolution of digital cameras is measured in "pixels", a condensed term for "picture elements". Pixels are basically the little colored dots that compose an image. More pixels in an image mean that a larger size picture can be printed or viewed, but increases the amount of storage or memory necessary to hold the image. Contrary to popular belief, more pixels are not necessarily better. Consider that a typical 14" monitor has a resolution of 640x480 pixels, which is about 300,000 pixels. The unedited image from a digital camera with a 300,000-pixel resolution will fill the screen of that 14" monitor. My 17" monitor is currently set at a 1024x768 resolution; a digital photograph of about 740,000 pixels would fill that screen. Many digital photographers take their photos at the highest resolution, which is often unnecessary, and a waste of memory and time. If the image is to be emailed, or posted to the web, the image will likely have to be substantially reduced in size to be practical. Using good quality photo paper and a photo-grade color printer, an 11x14 inch image will require about 4 million pixels (4 megapixels) to approximate the quality of a 35mm print. An 8x10 inch print will require about 2 megapixels. An inexpensive 1-megapixel camera is quite capable of producing satisfactory 5x7 inch photos. The least expensive digital cameras on the market, sometimes under \$20 (I recently paid \$19 for one), can easily produce a printed picture in the common 35mm print size of 3.5x5 or 4x6 inch sizes. Some digital cameras, such as one of the Olympus CamMedia series, can print directly from the camera, using Polaroid film, or conventionally export images to a computer.

Digital cameras need something to hold the images until they are downloaded to a computer, or printed directly. Various types of non-volatile memory cards, typically compact flash, smart media, or memory stick formats, are used to store

images. Currently, these cards are available in capacities up to 1 gigabyte, with 16meg to 128meg being both common and relatively inexpensive. The cards are reusable as images are erased from the cards. The contents of the cards can typically be transferred by the camera to a PC or Mac via a USB connection, or read directly by a card reader. Other popular cameras, such as some of the Sony Mavica series, use common 3.5" floppy disks. These floppies, each holding about 1.4 megabytes, can be read directly by a computer, as the images are written directly to the floppy. Some more advanced (and expensive) digital cameras can write to mini-CD discs, which can hold well over 100 megabytes, and can be read on any CD drive. Generally, the more storage of any type available in a camera, the better.

Many digital cameras also have the ability to record short movies, sometimes with sound. The length of the movie is only limited by the memory or storage available in the camera. For most common movie capable digital cameras, the length is typically measured in seconds, or a few minutes.

Zoom is another feature often available. With the traditional film cameras, optical zoom is used. The zoom on digital cameras can be optical, digital, or a combination of both. In terms of image quality, optical zoom is superior to a digital zoom, with the same magnification. One digital camera I tried is advertised as having a 20x zoom; 4x optical, and 5x digital. At 20x (combining the digital and optical zoom), the images were quite grainy, but at 4x (optical) they were very sharp. The same image at 4x digital zoom was visibly grainy, especially when enlarged.

Convenience factors, such as size, weight, flash, and battery capacity are often a matter of personal choice. Many digital cameras utilize the common AA size battery for convenience. Disposable alkaline batteries become expensive, if many pictures are taken, as they have a relatively short useful life. Rechargeable Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMH) batteries are much more expensive to purchase, but the better ones have a capacity of two to four times the photos as alkaline batteries, and can be recharged around 1000 times. In the long run, NiMH batteries are far less expensive to use than alkaline. Select the NiMH batteries by comparing their capacity, typically 1200 to 1800 mAh (milliamp hours), the more the better. Another factor to consider is the viewfinder. Many digital cameras have a conventional lens type viewfinder, while others have a small LCD screen that is a "what you see is what you get" view. Some cameras have both. Many users have found that it is harder to aim a digital camera using an LCD screen than a viewfinder, but others prefer to see the exact picture on the LCD an instant before the image is captured. Almost all digital cameras come with either an integral flash, or some sort of "hot shoe" or plug for an external flash. Some digital cameras combine their still function with a live video function, as they can also serve as webcams, sending live video over the net.

Digital photography can be both money and a time saver for many users, and should be strongly considered for that next camera purchase.

## Digital Photography

By David Berkowitz, Pasadena IBM Users Group

I have a couple of URLs—and a series of tip—that I can recommend to the other members. Anyone who is going shopping for a camera should learn a lot more about them before going near a store.

One more thing: Before I bought my HP Photosmart P1100, I took a compact flash card to the store, inserted it into the display model at Staples, then printed “my own” photos to judge the quality. When I saw what this printer could do on plain paper, I was sold. It was really nice to be able to use photos that I took — instead of a canned, optimized photo that was purposely created as a demo by the manufacturer.

You can't do that with many printers, but for those who are considering the 900 or Photosmart series from HP, I highly recommend it. The P1000 and P1100 have both Smartmedia and Compact flash support, so anyone that already owns a camera, or can borrow a memory card with some personal photos on it, should give it a try.

### Batteries

Some cameras ship with two types of batteries: Alkaline and Nickel Metal Hydride. The alkaline batteries are intended for temporary use while the Nickel Metal Hydride batteries are charging. They have to be conditioned before first use, which takes several hours. The alkaline batteries go fast and that type of battery should only be used if nothing else is available. On the other hand, the Nickel Metal Hydride batteries are excellent. I can usually get over one hundred photos per charge with my Epson 850z—and that includes use of the flash and LCD. I bought a spare set of four at Radio Shack for less than \$20 and I always have a spare set ready if I expect to take lots of pictures.

### AC Adapter

Nice to have, but not necessary if you do what I do. For less than \$8.00 I bought a compact flash-to-PC Card adapter and I use that to transfer the images to my notebook. For those who need to transfer images to their desktops, there are CF-to-USB readers that sell for around \$30. Either solution makes transfers directly from the camera unnecessary.

### Storage

Compact Flash memory is a good buy these days and will get even better. My camera shipped with a scrawny 8MB card, so I bought a 64MB card. With that card, I can take 91 photos at 1600 x 1200 (with moderate compression) or over 940 images at 640 x 480.

If you are going to take the camera outdoors, an AC adapter will not do you much good. Anyone who buys a digital camera will have to buy more memory or be very selective about which photos he/she keeps.

Some cameras come with Smart media memory and Sony is trying to make their memory sticks the memory of choice. Most people go for CF these days, for its higher capacity and for its compatibility with the PC card standard.

It's important to look for type II support. Nikon has been criticized because their otherwise great cameras only support type I. Luckily, there are fairly large capacity type I cards on the market.

Some cameras that support CF type II also support the IBM microdrives, which follow the CF type II standard. How about 340MB of storage for about \$450? Expensive, but much less expensive per megabyte than CF memory.

### User Interface and Operational Features

Some very good cameras have controls that are a pain in the elbow to use. Some others take almost all control away from the user. My Epson has a very good interface and lots of nice features, but much of the interface requires use of the LCD. The LCD is almost impossible to see well in bright sunlight, so some of the options are hard to use outdoors. Luckily, this camera can be used as a point-and-shoot model — and the results are pretty good in fully automatic mode.

One reason why I bought it was because it can also be used in a virtually manual mode. Though I do not have much experience with photography, I felt I might miss the ability to select the settings I want.

Having more control makes taking pictures more fun. It also provides a learning experience. I don't like products that take control away from the user, but that's my choice. Others may seek out that type of product.

### LCD vs Viewfinder

You expressed your preference for using the viewfinder over the LCD. That only works well if you are taking pictures at some distance from your subject. Almost all digital cameras are rangefinder cameras: The viewfinder is a separate element and it is positioned away from the camera lens assembly.

When you compose a picture, you are seeing a different view of the subject than the one the CCD sees. Because of that you have to deal with parallax error. If you don't know how to deal with it, you will not get the shot you intended, and you will probably cut off someone's head in the process!

Another problem with almost all cameras is that the image area seen in the viewfinder/LCD is different from the area captured by the CCD. Because the manufacturers are conservative (want to help the user), the image captured is usually larger than the one you saw in the viewfinder/LCD. It varies from one model to another, but it means that you may have to crop the final image to remove an unwanted part of the picture. That removes valuable pixels and reduces the effective resolution of the final product.

## FOTO JUNKIE HOOKED ON A DIGITAL CAMERA

*By Joan Stephens, CAUG, aka The Intrepid Traveler*

For quite some time I 'd been toying with the idea of purchasing a digital camera. But didn't think I could justify the expense since I was happy using my 35mm Minolta 400si SLR in which I had invested approximately \$1,000. including the 28-200mm telephoto lens (very handy for "sneaking" fotos of natives, without asking permission) while traveling. But I finally succumbed after associating with some of my "computer buddies" who constantly were singing the praises of using a digital camera.

Before the shopping process could begin I had to do some (a lot of) research, because I knew absolutely zero about a digital cameras. Again, through the help of persons I met at the CAUG Digicam SIG group I obtained information to begin the shopping process.

First I went to Roosevelt Baker and got some good information from a clerk there. Of course, I didn't know what he was talking about part of the time. Bill D. suggested I search the web and pointed me in the right direction. I searched [www.zdnet.com](http://www.zdnet.com) and [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com). D.B.Kline told me he bought his camera through [www.buydig.com](http://www.buydig.com)

I put a cap of \$500 that I was willing to spend. I found just what I wanted. I decided on an Olympus D-550, 3.4 megapixel, with optical zoom and LCD viewfinder. This camera came out in June 2002 and the list price was \$399. (It's now down to \$349. in the stores.) I found I could buy it online for \$306. This came with a 16MB Smart Media Card. I decided to upgrade to the "Executive Kit", which included a 64 MB Smart Media Card, camera case, etc. The price then was \$376. I also ordered four nickel-hydrate rechargeable batteries and charger for \$69.99, a Smart Media Card Reader for \$49. shipping was \$19.95, making a grand total of \$514. I received it in four days, shipped by Fed Ex.

So, now I have it, what do I do with it? Again, thanks to my computer buddies in CAUG (our computer user group) who helped me get started I'm trying to learn to use it. I was diligently reading the directions (few that there were) on how to begin.

The first problem: I couldn't figure out how to insert the batteries. I called Bill D., who was at the time, not feeling well and flat on his back in bed. I told him of the problem and he insisted that I come over and he'd help me. I did, and he did, and I took my first picture of "Sick Bill." I'm getting hooked fast!

Next hurdle was how to install the card reader. Knowing how "techno-logically challenged" I am, Jack Hord came out and installed it for me. So now I had my first successful attempt and am ready for another. I took another group of fotos and am on my way. I loaded them into the computer and couldn't bring

them up. Called Bill D. again; he made a "house call" and discovered that I was omitting one crucial step.

But I'm feeling more comfortable with it now. While in California recently, I found some good buys at the Fry's stores there. Bought two more 128 MB Smart Media Cards on sale for \$39.99 each. They retail locally for \$79.99. I also bought two more sets of nemi rechargeable batteries and another battery charger. I now have one 16MB, one 64MB and two 128MB Smart Media Cards, as well as three sets of nemi-rechargeable batteries and two chargers so I am all set for my upcoming trip to S.E. Asia next month. I hope to get beyond the "point and shoot" mode and capture some good shots.

Those of you who know me well are aware of my penchant for travel. Due to personal circumstances, I haven't been able to indulge my travel bug much this year, so far only a trip to the Cayman Islands. Didn't get my annual "Cuba fix" this year.

### Advantages of a Digital Camera

First of all, there is instant gratification. You can view immediately what you have shot, select the best and erase those not worthy of keeping. It does not require film or costs for developing prints. For example, depending on the resolution you shoot at, a 64 MB card will yield from seven (highest TIFF) to 664 (lowest JPEG) pictures per card. Roughly multiply that by 2 for a 128 MB card. Since your fotos are already saved as electronic images, they can be e-mailed, put on a website or edited immediately through the use of various editing programs such as Paint Shop Pro, Adobe Photo Shop, Corel, etc.

That's where the fun comes in. I have much to learn in that department! A film-based camera is better for some things, such as for more detailed pictures. Therefore, I will take my Minolta on my trip and use it as a backup.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using the articles on pages 2, 3 and 4 of this newsletter as long as it is kept in context, with proper credit given to the author. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization to which this user group belongs.

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Editors Note: The articles on pages 2, 3, and 4 of this newsletter were provided by the APCUG (Association of Personal Computer Users Groups) for use in our newsletter. This is where most of the articles for the last few newsletters have come from. Although these are great articles to use and the fact that they are made available free is nice, it would also be nice to see more articles from local members.

If you wish to write an article for this newsletter, please create it in any word processor (I can read all different file types) and submit them no later than the 15th of the month so I can include it in the newsletter. Sorry, we can't pay anything for your article, but you will get to see your name in print! :)

## Could a Budget Crisis Persuade More States To Adopt OSS?

By Steven Barnhart @Linuxguru.net

State Senator John Carona of Texas has proposed a bill to the Texas Legislature mandating the consideration of open standards and software while acquiring new pieces of software. The proposal makes Texas the second state, after Oregon's recent announcement, in the US to put forth such a bill.

Texas Senate Bill 1579 adds 2054.114 to Chapter 2054 beginning in section "B" by stating:

For all new software acquisitions, a state agency shall:

- (1) consider acquiring open source software products in addition to proprietary software products;
- (2) except as provided by Subdivisions (4) and (5), acquire software products primarily on a value-for-money basis;
- (3) provide justification whenever a proprietary software product is acquired instead of open source software;
- (4) avoid the acquisition of products that do not comply with open standards for interoperability or data storage; and
- (5) avoid the acquisition of products that are known to make unauthorized transfers of information to, or permit unauthorized control of or modification to the state government's computer systems by, parties outside the control of the state government.

Subsection (1) will require Texas, similar to Oregon's House Bill 2892, to consider using open source software along with current proprietary software considerations. Subsection (3) could benefit the development of open source software by requiring state agencies to "provide justification whenever a proprietary software product is acquired instead of open source software." By providing that latter section, open source developers can find out exactly what deficiencies the free software equivalent or what "features" the proprietary offering had to better enhance the value of open source software.

Some may question more justification on subsection (2), which states software should be acquired on a value-for-money basis. Exactly how will a software's value be judged? To assist with the previous statement the bill helps open source software's reputation by amending Section 2157.003 of the Government Code, providing guidelines for the judging of the "best value" as seen below.

"Best value" for purposes of this chapter means the lowest overall cost of an automated information system. In determining the lowest overall cost for a purchase or lease of an automated information system under this chapter, the commission or a state agency shall consider factors including:

- (1) the purchase price;
- (2) the compatibility to facilitate the exchange of existing data;
- (3) the capacity for expanding and upgrading to more advanced levels of technology;
- (4) quantitative reliability factors;
- (5) the level of training required to bring persons using the system to a stated level of proficiency;
- (6) the technical support requirements for the maintenance of data across a network platform and the management of the network's hardware and software;
- (7) the compliance with applicable Department of Information Resources statewide standards validated by criteria adopted by the department by rule; and
- (8) applicable factors listed in Sections 2054.114, 2155.074, and 2155.075.

In short, to keep the consideration of open source and proprietary software equal, the value of the software will be judged by the purchase price (1), compatibility of exchanging data (2), the software's ease of upgrading (3), reliability (4), level of training needed (5), support requirements (6), compliance with state standards (7), and factors set forth throughout the bill. Each of the eight points will allow open source software to become better as time goes on if this bill, as well as Oregon's, is passed. Even if proprietary software is chosen as said before, this bill will allow developers to find out the flaws of their current software and make it "enterprise and government ready."

Texas, like Oregon, is currently in a budget crisis. Proprietary software can be very expensive, which takes money away from the state for use in other projects and improvements. Could this new bill spread to other states in a budget crisis? States such as Ohio and California, among others, have high budget concerns and currently use Proprietary software for much of their government work. By proposing a bill similar to Oregon and Texas', those states in a budget crisis can begin fixing that money concerns by considering cheaper alternatives. Citizen living in Texas are encouraged to show their support for the bill by contacting their representatives as should citizens living in states such as Ohio and California to provide justification in a proprietary world. Will more states sign on to a similar bill? Will Oregon and Texas' bill pass? Time will tell.

Editor's Note: The text of this article was found on LinuxGuru.net and was included here as a timely addition based on the meeting topic for this month. This article pertains to the state of Texas, however, many other states have proposed similar bills. To date, I know of no states that have adopted OSS (Open Source Software), however, some government institutions have already turned to OSS to cut costs. OSS does not always mean Linux, but the majority of OSS is available for Linux.

## LCPC Board and Officers

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New Style is published eleven times a year, monthly January through October with a combined Nov-Dec issue. General meetings are held in the Overholt Auditorium at the Lutheran Hospital on the last Wednesday of January through October with a combined November-December meeting on the second Wednesday in December. A list of our upcoming meeting topics is available at our web site at <http://www.lcpconline.com>. Thank you, Gundersen-Lutheran, for making this wonderful facility available. Meetings begin around 7:00 PM. Everyone is welcome, attend a meeting or two with no obligation to join.

Membership Dues are \$20 and cover an annual period following the month of payment. Membership entitles you to attend meetings, tap into the corporate wisdom, receive special user group discounts from publishers and others, and receive (and contribute to) this newsletter. You may also obtain software provided by publishers for review of the product.

The monthly newsletter is printed the Wednesday before the meeting, please submit advertisements and articles by the 13th of the month to [editor@lcpconline.com](mailto:editor@lcpconline.com). Unsigned articles are written by the editor. Other user groups are welcome to reprint with proper credit to the La Crosse PC Users Group and must include our web page address. Please contact the Newsletter Editor for commercial advertising rates. There is no fee for non-commercial advertisements placed by members.

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