

Issue Number 3

Points of Interest:

- Important info about Spam, Viruses & Spyware
- Take our quiz and win prizes!
- Video Game Review!
- (new) Geek Speak!
- Computer Joke of the month

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An Informative Newsletter for Our Customers

Spam and Viruses and Spyware, Oh My!

Over the past year, more and more computer users have spoken out, complaining that their Internet experience has become increasingly unpleasant. Spam mail is on the rise, despite Congress passing the CAN-SPAM act, viruses are more prolific than ever, and Spyware continues to filter peoples personal information to third parties or hijack their browsers, taking them to unwanted websites. Despite assurances to the contrary, the Internet is still rough and problematic. However, there are steps and common sense that one can employ, in order to protect oneself.

On Spam.

Despite legislation, Spam is still too profitable for companies to easily give it up. The first and most important step is creating a "public" e-mail address, one that you can give out to websites, such as ones that you do e-commerce with. While many of these sites are reputable, some still engage in the process of selling off email addresses to marketers. Having a "public" email address that is separate from your regular email address creates a conduit for

spam email to go to. Most ISP's now allow you to create "multiple" email boxes. If you do not have this option, look into a free email service such as Hotmail. Also, be careful about posting your personal email address in message and discussion boards. There are "bots" that prowl the Internet, looking for any addresses posted in public forums

It is also critical that you are aware of the privacy policies of websites, and your own ISP. For instance, many ISP's have "opt out" programs, where you have to actually indicate to them that you do not want them to share your information with marketers, often by calling them up. Occasionally you will get "quiet emails" or physical letters, telling you that you have to "opt out" yet again. It is frustrating to see service providers "pull tricks" in order to trip you up.

You can also use built in spam email filters, or standalone filtering software products, such as the kind sold by Symantec and McAfee, but the best methods advocate stopping spam at

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What's Hot in the Industry Today?

USB Flash Drives

Quick, what's the oldest part of your computer? The hard drive? The video card? If your computer is like most everyone else's, chances are you still have a floppy disk drive. While almost every other major component of the basic PC has undergone generation after generation of improvement, the floppy drive has remained largely unchanged since it first came out in the early 1980's. And why not? They are small, fit easily into a pocket, have JUST enough space to carry a few critical Word files, and are extraordinarily cheap.

And it's not that alternatives haven't been tried in the past. The first major contender was the "extended-density" format which held twice as much data as a standard floppy. Except for NeXT and IBM, no other company adopted

the standard, causing it to become practically obsolete. Then there was the ZIP disk by IOmega.

While great for backing up relatively large amounts of data, its initial slowness and expense prevented its adoption as a "floppy replacement." 3M then attempted to create the "Superdisk", a floppy disk that held 120 or 240 megs of data, using a drive that could also read and write to standard 1.44 megabyte floppies. Speed problems, and lack of vendor adoption has doomed the idea to the same dustbin of history.

So what do you do if you are a student, and you want to keep all of your thesis files

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USB Flash Drive

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(which often exceed the storage capacity of a single floppy disk) on a sturdy, reliable medium that easily fits in your pocket?

Introduced several years ago, the USB flash drive is a fairly simple concept. An integrated circuit, composed of a piece of solid state flash memory, which can be written to and rewritten to millions of times is interfaced directly to a USB plug. While the device itself can be as small as a postage stamp, most models are sold as "fob-sized" key chain attachments, in order to protect the electronics inside. These "USB Drives" can hold as little as 16mb or up to gigabyte and more! Imagine being able to hold your entire floppy collection on a device no larger than a key!

If you have Windows Millennium, 2000 or XP, Linux 2.4, or Macintosh OS X, then operation is incredibly simple. Merely plug the device into your computer's USB slot, and your computer should recognize it as a new drive in a matter of sec-

onds. You are then free to copy files to it, or off of it, in exactly the same manner as a floppy, or your hard drive. (You can use flash drives with Windows 98, but it will require special drivers that should come with your device.) Newer computers even allow you to boot the computer off of the flash drive just in case something happens to your main hard drive. Other models have special security features allowing you to password protect files, while still others have built in MP3 players.

And best of all, the price has made these devices easily affordable. A device which can hold 128 megabytes (roughly 80 to 90 floppy discs) will run you under \$50. Some of the top brands to look out for are ones produced by SanDisk, Kingston, PNY and Lexar Media.

As always, if you have any further questions about USB Drives, and how they can more easily fulfill your data storage needs, please feel free to contact us.

Announcing The City of Northampton, Assessors Office Website Launch!

We at Arete are proud to announce the successful launch of the City of Northampton, Assessors Office website! We were so pleased to have the opportunity to work with the assessors to create a custom site that interfaces with an online database of their yearly property assessments for Northampton. The 'search for properties' section is programmed to allow dynamic access to this information. Browsers may choose whether to perform a general search (such as by street name) or a more specific search (such as map-block-lot). When the search has been narrowed to the desired property, detailed information is displayed. This information includes such things as evaluation, zoning, building details, building sketch, land information, etc. Visit www.northamptonassessor.us to get information about the Assessors Office, what they do and to have access to the database. This site is open to the public and not only contains information about the Assessors Office, but gives potential tourists links to some of the fabulous dining and shopping Northampton has to offer.

Take Our Quiz and Win!

This issue we thought it might be fun to sponsor a little contest for our readers! It's simple, all you need to do is go to our website www.aretecomputer.com, follow the instructions to submit your answers and you will be entered into a random drawing to win one of the following prizes!

- 1st Prize - 128mb USB Flash Drive**
- 2nd Prize - City of Heroes**
- 3rd Prize - AdAware Standard Edition**

Quiz Questions:

1. What is our current record for number of files infected by a virus?
2. What does USB stand for?
3. What is the name of the city you are assigned to protect in City of Heroes?
4. What was the failed standard that 3M attempted to create to replace the floppy disk?
5. What is the 4th sign that technology has taken over your life?
6. Name two of the four companies that produce USB Flash Drives.
7. What was the name of the legislation congress passed to help cut down on spam?
8. What two free programs can be used to help detect and destroy Spyware?



Contest Rules : All of the quiz answers can be found in our Newsletter. Entries must be submitted by December 31st, 2004. Once the entry deadline has been reached we will hold a random drawing for first, second and third place from entries with the most correct answers. Limit one entry per person.

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its source, and reducing the total amount incoming before it even hits your filter.

On Spyware

Anti-Spyware laws have recently been passed, but like CAN-SPAM, they do not appear to be terribly effective. Spyware is tricky: It comes bundled with seemingly innocent programs like screensavers, music players, and more. It comes attached to pop up windows, which ironically warn you that you may be infected with spyware, and that you should download their plug in...which itself is usually spyware. They masquerade as system messages, warning you about computer problems that don't actually exist. It's no wonder most computers are infected!

Spyware can do any number of things: track your web movements, send marketing data to third-parties, some even log every keystroke you make, creating massive security problems. Anti-spyware scanners are now a must for any computer user on the Internet. The first and best step, of course, is to prevent infection in the first place. Download a free popup blocker from Google, at toolbar.google.com. It's not perfect, but it works quite well.

Also, be very suspicious of any pop up messages you see. 99 times out of 100, if you see a message claiming "your computer is too slow!" or "your computer may be infected with spyware!", it is from a company trying to infect you. Also, be wary if a company wants you to download a plugin, especially if it's from Gator or Comet Cursor, two of the most egregious offenders.

While there are a wide range of products that claim to be spyware scanners and removers, there are two products, which are both free and trustworthy: Spybot - Search & Destroy, and AdAware. Most technicians will tell you to use both products together, as one will fill in for the gaps that the other misses. (For instance, SpyBot blocks certain exploits and immunizes your system, while AdAware destroys data miner cookies that SpyBot doesn't look for, etc.)

Both products are free, easy to install, easier to use, and are constantly updated. SpyBot is supported solely by donations (so be nice and give them some money now and then) and AdAware supports itself by offering more advanced versions of the software for money (the basic version is free). You can download AdAware at www.lavasoftusa.com, and SpyBot can be found at spybot.safer-networking.de.

On Viruses

Most people are pretty good at knowing the drill with viruses. It is critical that you keep your AntiVirus profiles up to date. Usually, a program like Norton Antivirus will do this automatically for you. Be suspicious of opening up any attachments on an email, although most trusted Antivirus programs can scan email as well.

Practice caution, skepticism, and common sense, and your Internet experience should hopefully improve! One hopes that in the future, new types of technology and laws will protect us. But new technology can always be worked around, and legislation is sometimes difficult to enforce; there is no substitute for good, old fashioned vigilance!

Video Gamer's Review by Josh Mintzer

Overall Game Score: 9.0

City of Heroes

For those of you who have always dreamed of wearing spandex and taking flight, bringing criminals to justice, and staring down heinous arch villains... your day has come! City of Heroes has arrived. Having hit the scene in April in what was regarded as one of the smoothest and most trouble-free online game rollouts, its popularity has soared.

The concept is simple enough: One year after the alien Rikti invaded, and killed all but eight of the Earth's superheroes, you are a member of the new generation that has risen up to fill the ranks. Start off with your basic origin concept and select your powers. These "power pools" are divided into categories, which determine the role you play. Want to dish out large amounts of long range damage? The Blaster role is calling to you. Playing a support role more to your liking? Then heal your comrades as a Defender, or freeze enemies in their tracks as the Controller.

For those of you looking for a vibrant fantasy setting, where you can make money trading, or earn experience building items, this may not be the game for you. Combat is the primary focus of City of Heroes, and it's something it excels at. The game play encourages diverse team play and tactical planning. As a hero, your primary function is keeping Paragon City safe from the many groups of evildoers, such as the mechanical Clockwork King or the mysterious Circle of Thorns.

There IS an intriguing storyline and history that is revealed as you complete more quests, but it is not quite as compelling as certain other online games, such as Earth and Beyond.

When you start off, you hit the streets, dispensing Government-sanctioned justice to thugs and street criminals. As your hero's career continues, you can either "hunt" at random, or take on missions provided by your contacts. Some of these missions are one shots, with a small reward. Others compose multi-mission story arcs, with a much bigger reward in the end for your persistence. Finally, you can team up with some friends and engage in Task Force missions, intense five to eight hour affairs with large risks and even larger payoffs.

NCSOFT has done a wonderful job of creating detailed, 3D play maps. If your character acquires flight powers, don't be surprised if you spend the first hour or two flying up to the rooftops of dizzyingly high skyscrapers. You'll be surprised what you find if you just explore!

This short review only scratches the surface of the game, which has eaten up more than its fair share of time at the Arete offices after hours. A broadband connection is pretty much required to play, as is a fee of about \$14 a month, on top of the price to actually buy the software itself. What are you waiting for, hero? Those city streets aren't going to patrol themselves!

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An Informative Newsletter for Our Customers

www.aretecomputer.com

Beware the Virus!



We are changing our virus section this issue, instead of offering warnings about specific viruses (which are just too numerous for us to keep up with these days) each issue we will highlight our latest encounters with killer viruses and their devastating effect on our customers. Recently we had a customer bring us a laptop computer that had been surfing the internet for months with no firewall or

virus protection. His machine had slowed to a crawl, barely able to run even the most basic of programs. We ran a scan on his computer and found a record 2,292 files infected with 4 different viruses and multiple spyware applications running. Thankfully most of his data was intact, but it took many hours to fully clean and get his machine running again to acceptable standards. Please make sure you always surf the internet with at least virus protection and a firewall, it is not safe out there!

Geek Speak!

Okay we admit it! We're guilty! We throw around acronyms and tech terms like they were rice at a wedding! In order to remedy this we've started our new section, Geek Speak, in hopes that we can define a few basic computer tech terms and increase our customers understanding when we forget that everyone doesn't know what we're talking about! We'll start this issue with some basics:

What does USB stand for? Universal Serial Bus, USB is a

standard port that enables you to connect external devices (such as digital cameras, scanners, and mice) to Windows computers. The USB standard supports data transfer rates of 12Mbps (million bits per second), a vast improvement over the serial port standard it is beginning to replace.

What does GB stand for? Short for gigabyte (1,024 megabytes). This unit is typically used to measure very large data storage or data transfer capacities, by current standards.

Computer Joke of the Month:

Top 5 Signs That Technology Has Taken Over Your Life:

1. You have never sat through an entire movie without having at least one device on your body beep or buzz.
2. You would rather get more dots per inch than miles per gallon.
3. You need to fill out a form that must be typewritten, but you can't because there isn't one typewriter in your house – only computers with laser printers.
4. You rotate your screen savers more frequently than your automobile tires.
5. While contemporaries swap stories about their recent hernia surgeries, you compare mouse-induced index-finger strain with a nine-year-old.