

# safe surfing

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF PERSONAL COMPUTER USERS WHO FREQUENT THE INTERNET, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON GIST SUPPORT GROUP MEMBERS.

### HOT AUGUST NOTES:

- A VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL
- B TECH LINE
- C STUMPER "CONTEST"
- D FOLLOW-UP & MISCELLANEOUS



## VoIP

Is Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) for you? Bottom line: If you make a lot of long distance calls AND you don't need a land line for DSL and/or fax, maybe so.

VoIP is the latest trend for private and business use, but, in my opinion, it's not going to replace the standard landline any time soon. That's primarily because a traditional telephone line is necessary for anyone who has a DSL broadband connection or for a fax machine.



And obviously you need high speed broadband in order to get VoIP because that's how you get it! But that doesn't even address reliability. Which is more likely, your telephone line fails or your internet connection is lost? As long as there continues to be a much higher incidence of the latter over the former, I can't see how VoIP could ever replace landline telephones.

The quality of the service has improved tremendously. With the exception of a distinct echo or delay, especially noticeable if both parties use a speaker phone or microphone and speakers, VoIP is virtually undistinguishable from the average telephone service. Use a headset when you use VoIP.



You can test the quality yourself for free by signing up for Skype and using a PC to PC voice service that is basically VoIP. Calls between Skype members are free worldwide!



Or you can activate a free 30-day trial with Vonage (one of the largest providers) or enroll with SunRocket and have your \$16 monthly fee refunded on a prorated basis if you're not happy with the service.



## Tech Line

One of my very few deviations from a pretty tech-oriented lifestyle is subscribing to and reading the morning newspaper almost without fail. I'm not sure why that's important to me. I could certainly get the same information probably get it a bit easier. There's just something very satisfying about retaining some old traditions.



One morning in early July I learned about an unusual number of tech-oriented several revelations in one Sacramento Bee Issue:

**Business** – Good news/Bad News for XBOX 360 owners. The new video game system consoles have had so many hardware maintenance problems that Microsoft has extended their warranties to three years.



**Business** – Since eBay now owns about a quarter of Craigslist, it's no real surprise that they not



long ago introduced a site in some countries (NOT ours) called Kijiji. Originally debuted overseas only, eBay has now introduced the new classified service to selected cities across the US too. Kijiji.com seems virtually identical to Craigslist functionally but has a fancier look about it. And it incorporates something Craigslist used to have but dropped: an email alert feature that was one of my favorite parts of Craigslist. That aside, though, so far I see no reason to move to Kijiji until they list far more items.



On a related note, Google' has had a similar free classified service for quite awhile called Google

Base! It's here: <http://base.google.com/>

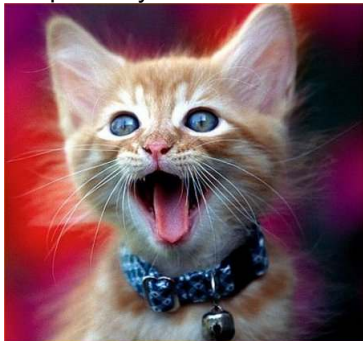
**Metro** – The Sacramento Public Library, along with those in many other major cities, is now offering the free download of audio books from their systems for library card holders. This signifies virtually the ultimate development in internet convenience and effectiveness to me. Not only do you not have to return the book, but you can also burn a copy onto a CD or download it into an MP3 player. How great is that!?

SACRAMENTO PUBLIC LIBRARY



Foundation

**Comics** - I wasn't specifically reading the comic section, honest! The last part of one of the articles I described above just happened to continue on a page facing the Comics. So here's what I was amazed to learn: Of 14 strips, five contain talking animals and three of those are primarily dedicated to cats! What the heck! OK, so



it's not necessarily tech-related. In fact, it seems to be somehow the antithesis of tech, doesn't it? What's happened in the decades since I stopped following the comic strips? Sheesh!

## Stumper Contest



OK, I give up! I got considerable feedback indicating there was sufficient interest in the Stumper Contest (and maybe even for the newsletter in general) for me to keep it up. Let's try one this month without a reward except for the announcement of the winner's name here. That'll be interesting, huh? (Every so often I may award a gift or prize as well).

*If you're like me and not a "real" typist, you often hit keys you hadn't intended and don't notice that until long after the error(s). That's probably because we're looking at the keys most of the time, not the screen. There's a way within Windows XP to create an alert when you hit the CAPS lock, SCROLL lock or NUM Lock keys. Tell us how to do that for this week's Stumper and win Honorable Mention in next month's newsletter!*

## Follow-up & Miscellaneous

**Automobile Backup Device Recommendation:** Last month I printed Sandy Ellis's recommendation for the wireless VR3 which she bought at Wal-Mart for \$100. She very kindly contacted me with an amendment:

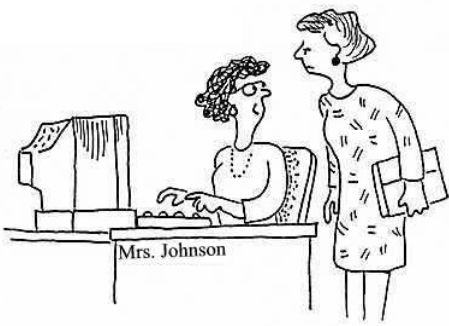


*I am disappointed in the performance of this item. It sometimes works when in reverse and sometimes doesn't. It does not work well after dark. The screen has distracting static "noise" while driving whenever it is near wireless devices such as overhead devices at stoplight intersections, garage door openers, etc. So, one tends to turn it off to avoid the distraction which defeats its purpose. So...I am retracting my original comments about this item. I think I made a \$300 mistake and don't want to mislead anyone else into doing this.*



I just tried **Google's new web-based word processor and spreadsheet** with mixed success. The idea is great

(create and retain your documents online so that others can easily see them and edit them if you allow that), but the process needs work. I was able to post a few Word



"This word processing program is very user friendly. All the O's contain a happy face."

documents subject to Google's limitation of size: max of 500KB. First of all that can be a pretty restrictive limit

nowadays, especially if you imbed photos and tables. Secondly, the formatting does not transfer accurately in many cases. Sure, the program is pretty impressive given that they've tried to emulate the most common word processor's programming, but it's only for rudimentary documents and editing at this point.

Spreadsheets seem a bit better from a formatting standpoint, and I'm very impressed that some of my very complicated formulas transferred accurately. But the 50,000 cell maximum seems a bit restrictive for business use.

If, like most people, you only need a basic word processor and spreadsheet program, this is a great way to get it free. Further, it allows you to simply share the documents with your recipients and collaborators. No need to waste a stamp or email message!



Have I mentioned [PCPitstop.com](http://www.pcpitstop.com)? If not, please make a note of it. The site, like all other good sites, does require you to register in order to derive their benefits, but that's the extent of the

pain. Their services are free, and that includes a scan of your PC that can significantly aid in determining the right security settings, learning about your hardware and in optimizing the speed of your system.



Which is better, **Netflix or Blockbuster**? Just in case you haven't been following the latest developments of the leading online video rental outlets, I have! I've used both of these

excellent programs and can tell you they're virtually identical in terms of ease of use, variety and number of titles available, cost, speed and customer service. However a few notable differences might be significant for some: 1. Blockbuster has recently added a very nifty feature to their program that allows you to return the DVD to the store and exchange it for any other in the store. 2. Any DVD mailers you return to the store qualify you for a free in-store rental. 3. Blockbuster also gives you a coupon for an additional free rental every

month. These additional features cost you about a buck per month more than the Netflix service without them. But that's not bad when you consider that the minimum service starts at \$4.99 for both services (a dollar more for the Blockbuster Total Access version) allowing one DVD at a time and a maximum of 2 DVDs per month.



Netflix does have one feature Blockbuster does not (yet): you can download movies to your PC for controlled access viewing (i.e., they time out) on your computer. That might be a very nice feature if you would enjoy watching videos on your computer screen or if you have the ability to pipe your PC video to TV (increasingly common with today's emphasis on home media centers).

There are other alternatives, none of them better unless you need online video game rental too, and most of them are summarized here: <http://www.alldvrentals.com/>



I'm a PC. I'm a Mac.

I'm not sure I should even touch the **MAC vs PC Argument**, but it's irresistible. I'm a diehard PC advocate and MAC complainer, but I fancy myself as being objective too. Sure, those humorous MacIntosh ads are cute and even make a few valid points. But there's really little doubt that match and set clearly go to PCs. The best summary of

differences I've seen was produced by PitStop and is available for your review right here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxHwu5aD41k>

**Note:** By the way, every site I've mentioned this month is easy to navigate to: just add ".com" after its name and enter that in your browser's address block. The only exception to that rule this month happens to be my favorite site, [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org)



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