

Bits & Bytes

A Publication of the Kern PC Users Group

January meeting

Thursday Jan 10 at 7pm

Caroline Corser talks about
her use of computers as an
author



Board Members

President:	Rhonda Pierce Pierce27@earthlink.net
Past President:	Bill Peacock 328-0180 bpeacock@pacbell.net
Vice President:	Stuart Ree 589-6172 rsrcomp@pacbell.net
Secretary:	Tony Rizos 872-5622 trizos@ncinternet.net
Treasurer:	William Lowell 664-1244 wlowell@bc.cc.ca.us
Director:	Steve Garcia Sgarc@ix.netcom.com
Director:	Caroline Corser 871-9201 Cmcorser@pacbell.net
Director:	Rick Daney rddstewy@aol.com
Director:	Ray Stubbs 834-6166
Newsletter Editor:	David Chalmers dcchal@pacbell.net
Education/SIG Coord	Needs a Replacement
Kipug Webmaster	Tom Rabe Editortjr@aol.com

The following rates are for one insertion in the **KIPUG** newsletter. All copy must be received camera-ready, no later than the 15th day of any given month for publication in the following month's newsletter.

Camera-ready copy should be submitted to Bits & Bytes, c/o Dave Chalmers, P.O. Box 2780, Bakersfield, CA 93303

KIPUG members who have computer related items for sale or trade or who have information they would like to share with other members may do so **FREE** of charge as space permits.

Ads larger than business card size are subject to 50% of normal advertising fees. Non-members are subject to the normal advertising fees.

Business Card	\$ 5.00
Quarter Page	\$ 15.00
Third Page	\$ 20.00
Half Page	\$ 30.00
Full Page	\$ 60.00

ADVERTISERS

KIPUG will mail your direct computer user targeted mail advertisement (fully prepared for mailing, including postage) to our entire membership at a reasonable fee. For more information, please contact Rhonda Pierce, President, at pierce27@earthlink.net.

Genealogy Corner

Bits & Bytes

Jim Opperman

January 2002

One of the most important and useful web sites for German Genealogy Information is:

<http://go.to/Hessen>. This site is run by Don & Marga Watson, and includes period maps, surname derivations, surnames indexes, vital statistics records, and many other fine features not found in your average, run-of-the-mill web sites.

Stop by, even if your German ancestors are not “Hessians.” (Or even if you have no known German Ancestors).

Genealogy.Com has an excellent “How-To” Guide on getting started with Genealogy. Use the <http://www.Genealogy.com/mainmenu.html> link for full details.

Check out these FREE lessons and how-to articles, to explore further:
http://www.Genealogy.com/27_karen.html.
FOCUSING ON RESEARCH GOALS
FOR THE NEW YEAR.

FAMILY HISTORY BEGINS AT HOME, is another link at http://Genealogy.com/79_fs-start.html.

BEGINNING GENEALOGY LESSON at <http://www.Genealogy.com/uni-begin.html> is still another site worth checking.

Have a great time with your Genealogy exploration during 2002!

Remember, I appreciate any kind of feedback you care to pass along—good, bad, or indifferent at mentor-jim@atsecure.net.

What is an “Operating System”?

Steve Garcia

At a recent general meeting a number of SIGs were announced. One of these was a “Linux SIG” or a “LUG” as they are sometimes referred to. That's for “Linux User Group” in case you were wondering.

Although a few people were aware of what Linux is, it seemed to be a new term for the majority of our members. The explanation that Linux is an “Operating System” still seemed a bit unclear, so now might be a good time to explain just what an operating system might be.

Operating systems have been around nearly as long as computers. Nearly.

In the very beginning, there were no operating systems. Computer operators knew the numeric codes that stood for the fundamental operations the computer could perform, and fed them into the computer -- by hand, sometimes using switches on the front or something equally crude. Early computers didn't do very much that was complicated. It was mostly math, and each

problem had to be set up carefully and then run.

As computers got more sophisticated, other devices started getting attached to them, and what they could do became more complicated. Many of these other devices are now considered part of the computer, but they were separate devices in those days. Keyboards, monitors, disk drives, even memory were not considered part of the computer. In fact, keyboards and monitors were a relatively recent phenomenon. In the early days you thought you were pretty uptown if you could connect with a teletype. (Mice? Surely you jest! The mouse didn't show up until the early 80s.)

With all these devices, and the expansion of what the machine could do (text processing? What a concept!) feeding in numbers to get the computer to do what you wanted became inadequate. Actual programming languages were invented to make the programming seem more intuitive, and a special type of program came along to make handling all those attached devices manageable. This type of program became known as an “Operating System”.

We're going to skip discussion of BIOSs, although the BIOS is another

essential part of making an integrated computer system possible.

Each type of computer had its own operating system, and all worked in a different manner. These operating systems were written by the vendor who sold the computer. A large company whose name consists of three initials once did a survey of their customers and concluded that a total of 20 computers nationwide would saturate the market.

They were wrong. As more computers made it out into the market, writers of operating systems began to borrow ideas from each other, and a remarkable thing started happening. A degree of standardization started to occur. Operating systems written by someone other than the hardware vendor began to appear. Unix is an early example of such an OS.

Fast forward a few years. In the late 70s, hobbyists started trying to build their own computers from scratch. The very first “personal computer” (the Altair) was operated by... um... flipping switches on the front to program it. This didn't last too long.

Many of the early personal computers

used a simple operating system known as CP/M. It worked across a wide variety of machine types. It had a text based, command line interface, like most other operating systems of the time.

When IBM was designing their first “Personal Computer” they had plans to use CP/M themselves, but had trouble connecting with the owner of Intergalactic Digital Research, owner of the OS, so they mentioned in passing to the little outfit they were buying a BASIC interpreter from that they were also interested in an operating system if they knew of one available. This small language vendor immediately went out and bought QDOS (Quick and Dirty Operating System) from Seattle Software and renamed it to Microsoft DOS. They then told IBM, “Sure, we happen to have an OS.”

Since that time, there have been numerous operating systems written for computers compatible with those first IBM PCs. In the late 80s, Microsoft created a pretty overlay to DOS to make launching programs easier. By the third version it became almost usable, and by the fourth version it had started to take on some of the aspects of an

operating system itself.

IBM and Microsoft jointly created a new operating system known as OS/2, but it wasn't until Microsoft pulled out of that project that OS/2 really matured. Meantime, Microsoft took their part of the OS/2 base code, added their Windows interface to it, and called it NT. It took quite a bit longer for NT to mature, and there are some significant design flaws. Nonetheless, NT is a true operating system rather than an overlay on top of DOS like Windows 3.x and Windows 9x were.

In the mean time, other types of computers weren't standing still. The "real work" of the world was largely being done at the enterprise level with Unix machines from Sun, HP, IBM and others. The Internet was built on Unix machines. DEC's VAX computers, running the VMS operating system were a mainstay of scientific computing the world over. IBM and other big vendors provided mainframe based systems running proprietary OSES which handle most of the high stakes financial work of big business.

In the PC world, Apple had their MacOS running on their computers. A

small outfit called Be was creating BeOS, a very sophisticated OS that would run on both Macintosh and "IBM compatible" PCs. IBM had DOS and OS/2, Microsoft had DOS and NT (Windows 9x counts as DOS) as well as (for a short time) Xenix, a Unix clone. Digital Research had a very nice version of DOS known as DR-DOS. SCO Unix is still the basis for many specialized and robust applications for small businesses.

And a college student in Finland wanted to be able to use a PC based Unix clone called Minix, but it was too expensive for him, so he started writing his own. After working on it for a while, Linus Torvalds decided to have some of his friends test it to see what they thought. One of his friends had an FTP site on the internet, so Linus posted it there for people to download, calling it Freenix. The friend who had the FTP site didn't like that name, so he renamed it for Linus and called it Linux.

That name seems to have stuck. It's been a decade since that first crude kernel was posted for comments, and Linus doesn't work on it alone anymore. There are thousands of other programmers that work on enhance-

ments to Linux and the systems that have grown around the Linux kernel.

Since Linux has started growing in popularity, quite a few other Unix flavored OSES for PCs have also grown in popularity. Some of these, such as the BSD family of OSES, are actually far older than Linux. Each aims for a different target audience, and some of them do a very good job of being what they are trying to be. Others, such as QNX aim for “appliance” type applications.

In short, although the majority of the PC using public can't conceive of a computer without Microsoft Windows, Windows is only one of a vast constellation of PC operating systems. Not the best of the bunch, by any stretch, either. It is however, by far the best marketed.

In future months we will examine in a little more detail what Linux is, how to get it and what you can do with it.

Are User Groups Infected With Funnel Vision?

By Lynn L. Kauer

Funnel vision is a malady that too often infects small organizations. This malady isn't restricted to user groups per se as it can infect any organization. The development of the malady originates from the thinking that only information gathered from a closed group is important or meaningful. I've seen the writing of editors pleading for articles from their members so that they will have something to put into their publication. This article is intended to bring to light my thoughts and opinions I've come to realize since I became involved as editor over eight years ago.

It is no secret that the SVCA exchanges newsletters with other user groups. They are a wealthy source of information and differing ideas that we use for a number of purposes. I've long seen a pattern that I call “Funnel Vision” that can invade a user group and cause its demise. There are many forms. When I speak of funnel vision I am speaking to how a group attains information. We all know that a funnel is a cone shaped device that is large at one end and tapering to a small opening at the other. We use a funnel to pour liquids or powders into containers with small openings. The reason is that the liquid we are pouring into the funnel may originate from a saucepan (larger source) that contains a lot of liquid but by its very shape doesn't allow a small

stream to flow from it. Thus, the funnel contains the overflow, the transfer of liquid is contained, and the liquid is transferred into the smaller container. User groups are small containers while the APCUG community is the larger container. If we learn to use the resources of the large community we can use the information to educate our members.

Symptoms of the Disease

As I scan the newsletters we receive, and those I access online, I find two distinctive forms of funnel vision evident. The worst form are the newsletters that contain only advertising with a short message from the President covering the reports of the groups last meeting or where he or she last traveled. There is no information transferred to the reader except for advertisements. I've often wondered why the group wants to spend its money publishing each month. Possibly it's because it is a source of revenue and the monetary reward is all that is important to them. The less insidious form of funnel vision is more widespread. These newsletters are by and large a good-looking publication with a decent layout. The funnel vision becomes evident when it becomes apparent that only members of the group are contributing to it. Sadly, the editor has elected to only publish articles written by its own membership. As I watch them over a period of time it becomes apparent that few new insights or ideas are being shared. All the information is basically being recycled into new

forms of wording—but little new information is offered. Over the years I have watched the publications of these groups diminish in size. One that I looked forward to reading each month has shrunk from a 12 page to a 4-page publication because of lack of content. Every so often an article will appear by one of its writers that contains a tip or trick, a warning, a new idea or an insight about something the writer experienced—the purpose of publishing a newsletter. Sometimes, I receive a newsletter where the editor has left a page or two blank with a note on it that reads: "This page is blank because nobody contributed anything this month." While it is intended to encourage writers to contribute it has a negative effect. People join user groups for two purposes: to be informed or entertained. When people are cajoled into having to write something, even if it's trivial, this is in my opinion funnel vision at its worst.

Reviews

To often publications contain nothing but reviews written by its members. I'll admit that I am not one to get really excited about reading reviews. I'm not opposed to publishing reviews but I feel that there is a need for balance. My reason for speaking on reviews is that I see it as a form of funnel vision because it again restricts information to a closed group. An argument is that it is a method of getting people to write and contribute to the newsletter. The intent is to have the writer develop into a

person who will write creatively. Yet, if the only information attained is from the closed group where do the seeds of creativity come from? How creative can a person get if all they are reduced to is writing a review in order to have something to print in a newsletter? Possibly, if they were exposed to articles written by authors of other groups they would get the vision and motivation to write something truly creative. When they see what others do they learn to see outside of themselves and look at new products and ideas with a new purpose.

Looking Through The Funnel

To this point I have been speaking of how I perceive some groups look at their organization through a funnel. When the focus of information is contained from within their own group they are looking at the user group community from the large end of the funnel and seeing it restricted by the small end—their own group. I suggest they take the funnel, turn it around and look through it from the small end. You'll see a bigger picture. This bigger picture is the APCUG community. I, as an editor, scan newsletters—printed and electronic—for fresh new information and use them in our publications. No, the SVCA is not unique in this approach. Some of my favorite exchanges are the newsletters that also contain a nice mix of articles written by their own members plus those attained from others. These groups have learned to use the whole APCUG user group community for informa-

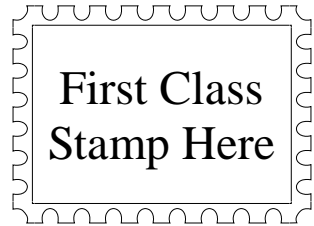
tion and support. There are no blank pages in their publications.

I've watched the larger group publications like Big Blue and Cousins of Canada and Capital PC User Group of Washington DC. They originate from large member organizations that have people within their membership who write a series of articles focused on their areas of expertise. As I've watched their publications through the years I found that they also use articles from other groups. The point is, they too contribute and acquire from the entire APCUG user group community.

Conclusion

The point I have been trying to make is to encourage editors to use the entire user group community as a resource. There is a wealth of information available and some ideas that are totally new. To attain these resources all that they have to do is to turn their funnel around to see the bigger picture. There is no need for a group's publication to go wanting for a lack of articles. Use the resources from those who learned how to use a funnel for the greater vision—the APCUG community.

From the "Blue Chip News"
a publication of the Saginaw Valley Computer Association
Saginaw, MI



P.O. Box 2780
Bakersfield, CA

We are on the web at
WWW.KIPUG.ORG

Your Address Here

Tom Rabe Webmaster

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month at
the Kern Superintendent of Schools Building.
17th and L streets Downtown
Meeting Time is 7 pm