

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

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Windows 16-bit subsystem error

I've struck several Windows XP computers lately which gave an error message: "16 bit Windows Subsystem C:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM32\AUTOEXEC.NT.The system file is not suitable for running MS-DOS and Microsoft Windows applications. Choose 'Close' to terminate the application", or something similar, when installing or running certain programs. Unless this problem is corrected, it is impossible to install applications whose setup programs were not specifically written for XP, making it potentially very serious indeed.

What causes the problem? Some people report experiencing it after installing SP2, but a more common explanation is that it is triggered by one of the trojans that are circulating at present. Whatever the cause, here's a possible fix:

- Turn off System Restore to ensure that any backed-up virus are removable
- Thoroughly delouse your computer with an up-to-date antivirus program
- Run Ad-aware or similar to remove all spyware
- Download XP_FIX.EXE and run it – this will replace AUTOEXEC.NT, CONFIG.NT and COMMAND.COM, corruption of which is the usual cause of the problem
- Turn System Restore back on
- Reboot
- Check that the firewall is active. Better yet, install a good third-party firewall

- Copy XP_FIX.EXE to your CD of repair tools, or copy it onto a floppy disk if you don't have a burner

XP_FIX.EXE can be downloaded from <http://www.visualtour.com/downloads/default.asp>.

If you find it doesn't work, or the problem keeps coming back, go to <http://support.microsoft.com/?kbid=324767> and follow Microsoft's recommended procedures for dealing with the problem.

Then resolve to maintain a fully functional firewall and an up-to-date antivirus program, and to screen regularly for spyware, in future.

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Allway Sync v.2.0

Fairfax, Virginia. - March 11, 2005

On 11 March 2005, D Usov & Co., a Fairfax, Virginia based software company, announced the release of Allway Sync, the latest version of a simple tool for automating data exchange routines across multiple computers. Compatible with all versions of Windows, the application enables the user to synchronize multiple files/folders stored in one or several computers and keep them regularly updated. Synchronization can be performed in both directions, via a network connection or any removable drive, including USB keys, flash drives, Zip drives, CDRW and DVDRW disks.

Allway Sync features an interface which the makers describe as both “intuitive and instructive ... with two data selection fields for building a sync association between two folders”. Once the association is set, the program can analyse what files has recently been modified and update their counterpart in the second folder. The user can easily view all existing sync associations, their current status, and synchronise them all in one click. The makers claim that thanks to the unique sync algorithm which doesn't depend on the system clock accuracy, data synchronisation with Allway Sync has reached the top level in reliability, accuracy, and speed.

Always Sync features at a glance

1. Free for personal use synchronization software;
2. True bi-directional file and folder sync;
3. Proprietary algorithm with file database;
4. Synchronization via USB keys, flash drives, CDRW disks, Zip-devices, etc;
5. Multilingual user interface.

Availability

Allway Sync 2.0 runs under Windows 98/Me/XP/NT/2000/2003 and distributed as a freeware product (with limitations). The program can be downloaded for free at the company's website:

<http://www.AllwaySync.com/download/allwaysync-2-0-6.exe>

For more information please visit:

<http://www.AllwaySync.com>

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John James is burning

DVDs, that is. Those of you who attended the March meeting will know that John covered the fundamentals of making your own DVDs and reviewed DVD Shrink, a program that does far more than its name implies. Those of you who missed this excellent presentation may like to read his notes. These have been made into a feature article on the website. At the time of writing, they were only available for online reading, but I plan to add a PDF file shortly for those who wish to download and print them.

I'd like to thank John for making them available. I'm sure that those members who were unable to attend, but who are interested in adding a DVD burner to their computer system, will also appreciate his efforts.

If you are thinking of adding a DVD burner, check out the minimum system requirements carefully before you make your purchase. Typically you will need an 800 MHz CPU (or faster), 512 MB of RAM (or more) and 10 GB (or more) of hard drive space for recent dual layer burners. The burner itself may only cost you around \$100, but the computer upgrade to use it needs to be taken into account too, if you have an older computer.

http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/files/services/publications/feature/dvd_burning.htm

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AGP and PCI-E in one motherboard?

AGP (Advanced Graphics Port), having gone through three versions is now steadily being replaced by PCI Express (PCI-E). If you are upgrading your computer, this has usually meant that you needed to buy CPU, motherboard, and video card in one expensive hit. Too bad, if you still had a high performance AGP video card, it was now obsolete.

Microstar International (MSI) have just announced a solution. Instead of a "true" AGP slot, it has an Advanced Graphics Riser (AGR) which is compatible with AGP 8x, but is a little less responsive. MSI suggest that you can use this motherboard to make the upgrade in stages. I suspect it will also appeal to budget system builders, who can use, say, an MX440-based video card with the PCI-E slot allowing the purchaser to a high end video card later.

From the UK's **Trusted Review**: ... *At the top is a single x1 PCI Express slot, then a x16 PCI-E graphics slot, and then an AGP 3.0 slot with retention device. Below that are three regular PCI slots. MSI has realised that every PCI Express motherboard will only have two or three PCI slots, and that leaves a fair chunk of system resources free for what it terms an Accelerated Graphics Riser, or AGR. The AGR is effectively identical to an AGP 3.0 slot except that it has a significantly slower connection speed than AGP, so even though MSI has published a list of compatible graphics cards which includes a WinFast 6800GT and ATi Radeon 9700, it's only part of the story.*

www.msi.com.tw/html/products/mainboard/agr/7135agr.pdf

We tested the K8N Neo3-F using an Athlon 64 3200+ CPU with 1GB of Corsair PC3200 memory with both PCI Express and AGP versions of the 6600GT on Detonator 71.40 drivers with the core running at 500MHz and the memory at 1GHz. The results were eye-opening, and in Doom3 with no FSAA the PCI-E card scored 69.7fps and the AGR version got 24.6fps. We tried a few test runs with an AGP Ti4600 and it suffered a performance hit of around ten percent compared to an nForce3 native AGP motherboard, so there's no doubt AGR isn't as good as AGP.

But that's not the point.

MSI is using AGR to avoid the awful Intel 915/925X situation where you have to buy a new motherboard, processor, memory and graphics card in one huge, expensive bundle. With the MSI K8N Neo3-F you can buy a new processor and motherboard for about £200 and if you have an old MX440 or similar, you won't even notice a performance drop. When you have the necessary £150 it's time for a 6600GT and your upgrade is complete and you have the same performance as a regular nForce4 motherboard. Incidentally, system performance is impressive. We ran SYSmark 2002 and got 286 marks, and in PCMark04 we got 3,554 marks, which is very acceptable for a budget PC.

...

Verdict

MSI has come up with a decent budget nForce4 motherboard, but the icing on the cake is its AGR technology, which is a clever idea that will help you delay the move from AGP to PCI Express graphics.

I checked a couple of Australian wholesalers, who handle most of the MSI range, and neither listed this motherboard yet, but, no doubt, it will find its way onto the market here in due course. So, if you are planning an Athlon 64 upgrade and funds are limited, it might pay to wait until it is available and do the upgrade in two stages. Alternatively, if your computer work is not too demanding, forget the PCI-E video (which, according to PC User, is yet to show its full potential) and buy one of the older style motherboards with an 8x AGP slot. With an nVidia 6600 chipset on your video

card, the AGP slot can deliver sparkling performance suitable for most applications.

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No liability, but screen to be replaced

I reported last time on Paul Horne's experience with a screen cleaner. The company who market the cleaner have advised the reseller from whom Paul bought the cleaning liquid that they do not accept any liability for what happened. That's fair enough, given that it could be a manufacturing fault when the anti-glare coating was applied; it could be the result of inappropriate cleaners having been used since Paul bought the screen; or some other factor over which they had no control.

Nevertheless, they have indicated their willingness to replace Paul's monitor. They cannot do so with a Sony monitor, as Sony no longer market CRT monitors in Australia, but they have offered an equivalent monitor from a reputable maker. That's standing behind your product and they are to be congratulated for doing so.

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LCD prices to stabilise

LCD monitor prices have been falling for some time now. They have tumbled by more than a third since the middle of 2004. Combined with a strong Australian dollar, the falling world price has resulted in some 17in LCD monitors selling for less than \$400. But the bonanza is set to end, if LG Electronics (LGE) has read the market correctly.

According to a report in vnunet.com's newsletter, LGE plan to raise the prices of their 17in LCD monitors by 5% in the coming months. Luc Graré, sales director for information system products at LGE, said: "Supply and demand have reached a balance. We still might see prices drop in 19in, but in 17in monitors we have seen the lowest point."

Taiwanese market researcher, WitsView Technology, noted that prices remained stable in February for both 17in and 15in displays. For March it predicts that 17in displays will once again stay flat.

The recent price decrease was the result of a sudden growth in production capacity caused by manufacturers investing heavily in new factories. Demand for LCD displays is expected to reach record levels as consumers start to replace glass-tube equipped TVs with sleeker LCD models.

The market for LCD displays is a \$USD36bn industry dominated by Samsung Electronics.

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Next meeting

Build your own computer, or upgrade your existing one. On 12 April 2005, our own Sid Davis will show you what is involved. Even if you have never lifted the lid of your computer, this is one meeting that you won't want to miss. However, if you really can't make it, or the innards of your box don't frighten you, you may care to take Cnet's four lesson course starting 28 March 2005.

<http://courses.help.com/?tag=nl.e407>

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Different mice

Imagine a USB scroll mouse for under \$4. Better yet, go to Chickenfeed and buy one. It even has an adapter for PS/2 mouse ports.

Or how about a cordless mouse that doesn't need batteries? A4 Tech have come up with one that takes its power from a special mouse mat using electrical induction. The mat gets its power from a USB port. So instead of a free-standing mat

and a corded mouse, you have just the reverse. Selling for a recommended \$32.95, you can pick one up from Anyware resellers (<http://www.anyware.com.au>). It's also available with a matching (as in colour scheme) keyboard for RRP \$59.95.

Prefer one with batteries? Anyware have an A4 Tech rechargeable mouse that can be charged with a Nokia mobile phone charger! RRP \$29.95. Yet more Anyware offerings are mouse and tie sets (as in that strangling bit of rag men sometimes tie around their necks). They come with blue or white ties. There is also one with a floral scarf. RRP \$15.95 Anyware prices are for March 2005 only and may change thereafter.

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Linspire Five-0 released

Linux distributor, Linspire, has released an updated version of their Debian-based distribution. Here's what they have to say about the release. Note that prices quoted are US dollars:

Linspire Launches World's Easiest Desktop Linux, Linspire Five-0

Expansive System- Wide Improvements Result in Practical, Affordable Operating System for Homes, Businesses and Schools

SAN DIEGO, March 16, 2005 - Linspire, Inc. today announced the release of its latest operating system, Linspire Five-0. More than a year in the making and with more than 1,200 improvements, the newest version of Linspire boasts enhancements in every core application and provides the most secure, reliable and easy-to-use desktop Linux experience available for home, business and school users. Highlights include a completely revised and streamlined graphical interface, improved laptop and hardware support, significant Internet optimization, and dozens of enhanced software applications to provide a complete user experience. The new Linspire Five-0 operating system is available immediately via digital download from www.linspire.com/buylinspire and will be available in more than 1,000 retail outlets later this month. ...

Linspire Five-0 Features and Benefits:

- *Complete operating system: Built on Linux kernel 2.6.10; includes KDE 3.3 plus integrated office suite, Web browser, e-mail client, instant messenger, and more*
- *Improved security: New built-in VPN; new encrypted "wallet" for storing passwords and other personal information; pre-configured firewall; enhanced virus resistance with optional VirusSafe service*
- *Advanced hardware support: Easy plug and play support for removable media use; one-step diagnostic reporting; broader video support with X.org 6.8.2; sound system with real-time mixing support*
- *New, exclusive look and feel: Graphical user interface and themed Linspire environment; enhanced and expanded voice-narrated "How-To" tutorials*
- *Advanced Internet optimization: New Hot Words integrated search feature; built-in automatic spell checking in all Web applications including in email, Web browser and instant messenger; built-in BitTorrent support; new AOL dialer; enhanced firewall; MailMinder service*
- *Improved laptop support: WiFi profiles for mobility; Intel Centrino compatibility and AMD PowerNow; new wireless control panel and access point locator*
- *Improved support for schools and businesses: OpenOffice 1.1.3 office suite; improved networking; Lassist Suite (Reminders, MailMinder, Calendar, Address Book); Nvu Web-authoring system*
- *Improvements for home users: Lsongs Music Manager and Lphoto Photo Manager; RealPlayer 10; PhoneGaim Instant Messenger with free long-distance phone calls; Marble Blast Gold arcade game*
- *Expanded support for popular Internet, office and media file types: Supports QuickTime, Windows Media, Flash, Java, Real, .doc, .xls, .ppt, .mp3, .pdf, .mpg, etc. (complete list of supported filetypes at www.linspire.com/filetypes)*

For a detailed list on new features in Linspire Five-0, please visit www.linspire.com/newfeatures.

Availability and Pricing:

Linspire Five-0 is available immediately for digital download at www.linspire.com/buylinspire. Two versions of Linspire Five-0 are available: Linspire Five-0 Digital for \$49.95, and Linspire Five-0 Digital CNR Edition (includes subscription to the CNR Service) for \$89.95. Boxed versions of Linspire Five-0 will be available at more than 1,000

retailers nationwide by the end of the month. Linspire Five-0 is currently available in [US] English, and will be available in non-US English, Italian, French, Dutch, Spanish and German by the second quarter of 2005 with other languages to follow. For more information or to purchase Linspire Five-0, visit www.linspire.com.

As many of you may know, I opted to use the Xandros distribution of Linux, so I have had to rely on Don Trotman for a look at this new release of Linspire. I'll let you know in a future issue what I think and whether it addresses the concerns I had with previous releases. Meantime, visit Linspire's website and check out the screen shots.

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ID required

A while back I reported that Microsoft "Academic" software was available for personal use without being limited to students and teachers. Although I haven't seen any formal announcement, that offer may have been withdrawn. Harvey Norman insist that suitable teacher or student ID is required before you can purchase Microsoft "Academic" products and say so in the fine print in their catalogues.

Talking of Microsoft products, don't forget to redeem your rebate if you purchased an eligible product. The promotion ended on 31 March 2005 with the rebate having to be redeemed by 15 April 2005. Time is running out, so get that claim in quickly, while you still can.

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Fred Langa says

Fred Langa, who writes the highly recommended Langelist newsletter, has some good advice:

As of now, I ... think one good firewall (Sygate, Zone Alarm...), one good antivirus tool (Norton, NOD32, AVG...), and one good real-time anti-malware tool (I'm using Microsoft's) will catch almost everything. Add in protection from SpywareBlaster and a startup monitor (Mike Lin's StartUpMonitor, WinPatrol...) and periodic scans from tools like Ad-Aware and Spybot S&D, and you'll be locked down about as well as you can be.

Sygate: <http://www.sygate.com/>

Zone Alarm: <http://www.zonealarm.com/>

Symantec/Norton: <http://www.norton.com/>

NOD32: <http://www.nod32.com/home/home.htm>

AVG: http://www.grisoft.com/us/us_index.php

MS Antispyware: <http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx>

SpywareBlaster: <http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/spywareblaster.html>

StartUpMonitor: <http://www.mlin.net/StartupMonitor.shtml>

WinPatrol: <http://www.winpatrol.com/>

AdAware: <http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>

Spybot S&D: <http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html> ...

[Langelist: <http://www.langa.com/>]

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