

Rich's Ramblings for March 2005

I returned from my trip to Las Vegas trip where I attended the Consumer Electronic Show and the APCUG (Association of PC User Group) convention.. At the CES show I felt like I was in rush hour on the DC Metro. What a crowd!. I saw more plasma display panels and I-POD like devices and accessories than I care to mention. IMHO (In My Humble Opinion) there weren't any outstanding products that were earth shaking or really revolutionary. The noise in some areas of the huge convention almost required ear plugs.

I enjoyed the smaller mini-shows like the ever popular Show Stoppers where there were about 100 smaller vendors displaying their wares. It was much more intimate and you got a chance to really talk to some of the creators of the new products. Their techi's were there and they could spend the time explaining their products.

I saw several interesting devices that I am in the process of testing. One being a small 64Megbyte USB plug-in Pass2Go product which allows you to have all your passwords on a key chain USB device. All your web passwords can be stored on it and it is DES encrypted password protected..

There were lots of new digital cameras, they are really getting smaller and cheaper. There is no reason not to buy one as you now can take your memory storage device to many camera or drug stores to get them printed if you don't have a good color printer. Or upload them to some of the web sites and receive good quality printed copies of them in the mail, for a reasonable price. One thing I have a pet peeve about is Color Printers. I do not recommend buying one of the small 4x6 photo printers unless you have the extra dollars. If you need a color printer, I recommend buying one of the mid range HP or Canon color printers so that you can print larger sized photos instead of only the 4" by 6" size. As always, you should check out the prices of the cartridges for whatever color printer you decide on. If you only use it once a month, then you might want to consider the camera store or drug store to print your pictures. The ink on most of the color printers will dry out after long periods of non-use.

CES was not that an exciting show and I really found nothing that was new and innovative, outside of the refrigerator oven. <G>

The Computer Dealers Exposition (COMDEX) was not held this year (really cancelled for 2004) as it has been for the past 20 years in November. That's why I went to CES instead.

Another event that I always attend is lunch@Piero's by Pat Meier Associates, where there were about 20 smaller companies exhibiting their new products. Any of you gamers would have been in heaven as they had powerful computers with the top of the line video cards. Really fast and more real life games than the past years. Noise is a big factor in computers with heat being a problem and the manufacturers having to install huge heat sinks and fans. There was a company that had a fan-less PC which was top of the line and made no noise. Great new graphics display cards and there was even an Internet connected

golf kiosk for each of the Tee box's where you could order a 19th hole beverage or receive messages. What will they think of next? Especially when some people go golfing to get away from the internet or their phones..

Attending the pre CES convention held by the Association of PC User Groups was another real treat. There were over 300 movers and shakers from User Groups all around the world. All the big time Vendors were there providing great meals and exciting presentations. Intel, Microsoft, Adobe and CompUSA were the main presenters but there were about 30 other smaller companies represented in the APCUG Vendor Faire. This is where each of the vendors have tables placed around a large ballroom and provide food for the inner person and exciting chow for the mind. Plenty of free give-aways and exciting company. This year the apcug convention was held at the Stardust hotel complex which was really well planned. Wireless Internet access was again provided to all the attendees by Intel. Great reception and none of us missed our email.

When is free not free? The next time a web site or a message tells you that you should install some free screen saver or other program on your computer or you will miss out on the most wonderful option since sliced bread. Don't you fall for it without a lot of investigation.

I have been reading the blogs and BBS's on the web of horror stories from people who are always on the lookout for Free software. Some ended up having to reformat their hard drive to finally get rid of some spyware or trojan. Free software is a great idea, after all who doesn't want something for free. As my father used to say: You don't get nothing for nothing Same is true in computers. Some of the software does not give you an option to remove it after your tired of it popping up or interfering with your use of your computer. There are several programs that are available that will clean up your registry. Some are free but limited and most programs have a Pay version that is more robust. I have links to some of these programs on my CPCUG.ORG web site. Go to WWW.CPCUG.ORG and select members pages, go to Rich Schinnell's page and I have links to many good utilities and programs that I recommend.

This part is not for the Faint of Heart:

Now I want you to know that I have not lost my mind or getting senile but I could not resist buying one of the new Mini-Mac computers. For less than \$800 I got a 512 meg ram, 80 gig hard disk and a super drive that reads/writes DVD's. I am finding that it is pretty easy to use if you are used to the Windows XP type interface. It took a while to get it all setup as it asks you so many questions and then downloads over 60 megabytes of update files. I don't know what I would do if I only had a dial up connection. The Mini-Mac does not come with Monitor, keyboard or mouse. But a standard USB keyboard and USB mouse (optical preferred) work fine. I connected it to my LCD monitor via the DVI interface and it looks great. It comes with a DVI interface but they do provide an adapter for the 15pin standard VGA monitor. The power block is about the size of most laptops. The Mini-Mac measures about 6" square by 2" thick. I setup Eudora Email, AOL Instant Messenger and Yahoo Instant Messenger without any problems. I will be doing a bit more reviewing of it as I progress but I just wanted you to know that I feel that it is a very neat little device. I know you can buy a Dell computer for less money but it is the

thrill of the new devices that keeps me going.

Rich Schinnell is a regular columnist for the Capital PC Monitor and a founder of CPCUG. He has volunteered in almost every capacity that there is except being treasurer. (Not sure why that was but CPCUG is probably better off :) He can be reached at his home via phone at (301) 949-9292 or email at schinnel@cpcug.org or if your bold, at his .mac address of richnrockville@mac.com