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# MEGAPHONE

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THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MARYLAND USER GROUP

## Editor's Note

*from Paul Van Bloem*

### Elections

I suppose I'd better start off this newsletter reminding you all that the June meeting is our election meeting.

The nominated members for each of CMUG's elective officers are:

- ✉ President: Paul Van Bloem
- ✉ Vice President: Art Silverplate
- ✉ Treasurer: John Weske (incumbent)
- ✉ Secretary: Bill Baxter (incumbent)

No other candidates have been nominated, but you can write in other votes on the ballot, if you wish. (Please limit yourself to willing candidates, who are members of CMUG.)

As discussed a bit at last month's meeting, and described in the newsletter, I will be stepping down as Newsletter Editor if I'm elected President. We will at a minimum send an email reminder each month (suggestion: make sure George Coffin [gcoffin3@comcast.net] has a current email address for you!), but whether there will be a newsletter or not remains up in the air. To do more than a minimal emailing, someone will have to agree to serve as newsletter editor.

We are also still looking for a Program Coordinator, as described on page 3.

### Thanks

Thanks to Amy Begg DeGroff from the Howard County Library, who came and spoke at the last meeting, along with her colleague Luis Salazar. I'm not sure how she can be so energetic at 8 o'clock on a Wednesday, but we really appreciate her coming and energizing us. And the free coffee mugs were nice, too! If you haven't visited the library's website ([www.hclibrary.org](http://www.hclibrary.org)) recently, you should stop by; the new-and-improved interface Amy mentioned is now in place.

### Meeting Presentation

In addition to the

group's Elections, the June meeting will feature a presentation by Dave Whittle. I understand from Mike Hayes that he did one or more presentations to CMUG way back when. From the literature I've seen, Dave travels around speaking about hardware and software he's found to be useful; he also acts as a traveling salesman, and offers some of the same products for sale at a discount. His talk is entitled "The Best Kept Secrets in Technology - Only the Best, Not All the Rest."

### Online Shopping and Comments

There are a number of topics I've been meaning to write about, but working weekends really doesn't leave much time for writing.

Let me just pass on this fun information. A company called Denon has a 1.5 meter audio cable on sale at Amazon for \$500.99. The shipping is free, luckily. (See [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000I1X6PM/ref=cm\\_cr\\_pr\\_product\\_top](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000I1X6PM/ref=cm_cr_pr_product_top))

What is this wonder cable made of, you might ask? Well, here's the description:

Get the purest digital audio you've ever experienced from multi-channel DVD and CD playback through your Denon home theater receiver with the AK-DL1 dedicated cable. Made of high-purity copper wire, it's designed to thoroughly eliminate adverse effects from vibration and helps stabilize the digital transmission from occurrences of jitter and ripple. A tin-bearing copper alloy is used for the cable's shield while the insulation is made of a fluoropolymer material with superior heat resistance, weather resistance, and anti-aging properties. The connector features a rounded plug lever to prevent



### Next General Meeting

June means Elections! Our speaker will be Dave Whittle, who will discuss some of the useful software and hardware he's discovered over the years, and will have some of it for sale at discounted prices.  
Wednesday, June 18, 7:30 pm.....Florence Bain Senior Center

### Next Windows SIG Meeting

Ubuntu and Windows Can Co-exist  
Tuesday, June 24, 7 pm.....Florence Bain Senior Center

### Inside the Megaphone

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bending or breaking and direction marks to indicate correct direction for connecting cable.

I don't know if this is a mistake, or some sort of sales study, or what. I did find the comments encouraging, tho. Amazon allows customers to attach tags to an item, mostly to make it easier to find something again, but also to help other customers. The most popular tag for this cable is "snake oil".

There's also this very useful comment, among hundreds of others:

A caution to people buying these: if you do not follow the "directional markings" on the cables, your music will play backwards. Please check that before mentioning it in your reviews.

I was disappointed. I consider myself an audiophile - I regularly spend over \$1000 on cables to get the ultimate sound. I keep my music-listening room in a Faraday cage to prevent any interference that could alter my music-listening experience.

Sending any signal down ordinary copper can degrade the signal considerably. While ordinary listeners might not notice, to somebody with even a rudimentary knowledge of sound, the artifacts are glaring. Denon should have used silver wiring (hermetically sealed inside the rubber sheath to prevent any tarnishing, of course), which has a significantly higher conductivity than copper. Furthermore, Denon needs to treat the wires they use in the cable with a polarity inductor to ensure minimal phase variance.

Needless to say, I returned the cable and wrote an angry letter to the so-called engineers at Denon.

There are many more comments (and comments on the comments) at Amazon, many along these lines.

Hope to see you at the meeting,

- Paul Ye Ed



## Buying a Mouse More Important Than You Might Think

by Vinny La Bash, via APCUG

The average computer user recognizes how important the mouse is to getting things done. Mice have been part of the computer scene for over twenty years and with rare exceptions are simple devices to operate and control. That doesn't mean that people who use them are familiar with all their features and functions. That's not as bad as it may sound. Most automobile drivers don't have a clue how the internal combustion engine inside their auto engine works. Yet they usually manage to drive from one place to another without incident.

Selecting a mouse is much simpler than choosing an automobile, but there are things you should know before laying out your money. If it's not properly designed, your new mouse may not only result in poor computer performance, but can cause you injury.

The mouse may be the most common of the tracking technologies used in modern computers, but it is not the only one. There are trackballs, touch pads, and for ThinkPad users, track points. They all have their advantages and drawbacks. We will focus on the mouse.

Mechanical mice, those with the rolling balls on the underside, are obsolete. They have a tendency to gather debris on the underside, and require cleaning. Moving parts are their most serious weak spot because they will break down sooner than devices that rely on other technologies.

Newer optical mice suffer no such defects. They generate a beam of light that combines with an optical sensor providing a screen pointer that is well suited for meticulous graphics or serious game playing. No moving parts mean less maintenance and lighter weight. Optical mice will work on any smooth surface; a mouse pad is unnecessary.

Look for a mouse with a USB connection. It will probably be difficult to buy a mouse that does not have this type of connection today. The mouse is not considered a high-speed device, so it's not necessary that it be USB 2.0 compatible.

You may want a wireless mouse for no other reason than to reduce desktop clutter. There are many generic wireless mice on the market that will perform adequately, but doing this

on the cheap comes with a price. You will have a mouse that requires AAA batteries. Save your pennies and get one with an integrated rechargeable battery. High-end wireless mice include receivers that double as battery chargers, so your mouse will never suddenly expire in the middle of an important project.

Most rodents on the market today feature at least two buttons and a scroll wheel. The right button is used mainly for bringing up menus or lists of options. The left-hand button activates functions or commands. The scroll wheel, as its name implies, is used to scroll up and down screens, which is very useful for Web surfing or word processing. Sometimes the wheel can function as a third button activating instructions. Advanced scroll wheel functions allow left to right scrolling which can be very useful in wide spreadsheets or large graphics. Used in conjunction with the keyboard, the scroll wheel can zoom in and out of some applications, and can be used to make text appear larger.

Mice do not come in a one-size-fits-all product. Enlightened companies such as Logitech manufacture mice that are specifically contoured to fit a wide variety of hand sizes, and also to fit left-handed users. Logitech was among the very first companies to recognize that different-sized people have different-sized hands. Choose a mouse that is ergonomically designed to fit your individual hand size. This will go a long way to reduce the probability of developing carpal tunnel syndrome or some other crippling ailment.

A mouse is a simple device by computer standards, yet it seldom gets the attention it deserves. Take the time to find a good ergonomically designed mouse that suits the physical characteristics of your hand along with suitable options for your personal computing preferences. Productivity and good health are not mutually exclusive.

*[Editor's note: I have been using a Logitech scroll-wheel mouse for years. It is corded, and mechanical, but has held up very well. Of course, they don't make it any more, but the right-hand contouring is similar to their MX 400 Performance Laser Mouse, which you can see here: [www.logitech.com/index.cfm/mice\\_pointers/mice/devices/191&cl=us,en](http://www.logitech.com/index.cfm/mice_pointers/mice/devices/191&cl=us,en).]*

*This article comes to us from APCUG, the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which CMUG is a member. Vinny La Bash is a member and Contributing Columnist at the Sarasota PCUG ([www.spcug.org](http://www.spcug.org)) down in Florida. He can be reached via email at [vlbash\(at\)spcug.org](mailto:vlbash(at)spcug.org).*



## Deals from the DealsGuy

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click

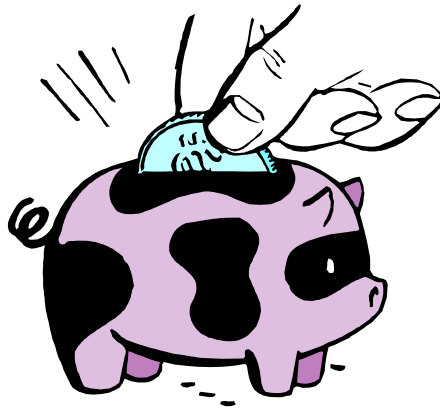
### Biometric Lock Update

I said I was going to return the Kwikset Biometric (fingerprint) Lock for my door because it was very unreliable, but I really liked it and wanted it to work better. I watched the video on their website and tried changing my finger scanning technique. It's working better for me and mostly opens on the first scan, but not always. However, my wife still has poor luck so she always uses her key, or waits for me to unlock it. Kwikset had a booth in a hardware show we worked so I asked a rep how to improve my wife's success getting the lock to work. He told me the lock can hold 50 different fingerprints, so, if I didn't need them all for other people, try scanning her finger several times in different ways with the chance that things might go better with more choices for the lock's computer to compare. He said it actually scans the skin makeup, not the fingerprint. It's worth a try! [Ed. note: here's a YouTube video showing the lock in action: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p7Kjapbu84](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p7Kjapbu84). They seem to cost around \$200.]

### For What It's Worth!

When I wrote up the USB Medical flash drive deal, my proofreader told me no medic in his right mind would plug it into their laptop, if they even had

a laptop in the ambulance, because an unknown device might cause damage to the computer or entire system. It made sense so I talked to a few medics about that and there seems to be varied opinions. One told me that he only looks to see if the patient has a wallet card or medical necklace, and they would not plug anything unknown into their computer. Another medic told me that if she saw the USB device with the medical logo on it, she would indeed plug it into their laptop to see what it revealed, and that their computer system would not allow any damage. In spite of the varied opinions, most said they would want to see the USB drive's content because the patient's welfare was important. Some said good advice is to post a conspicuous note in your wallet about the device. Would anybody fake a serious injury just to damage computers?



### Interesting Business

Bill Shook is the editor of a great newsletter for The Northwest Arkansas PC User Group and I really enjoy reading it each month. He seems to be the editor for life and doesn't mind. I read a very interesting tidbit in their March issue that had me wondering if it was for real, or just an April Fools joke, considering the month. NWA-PCUG's President, Wes Eckles Jr., starts the newsletter with the "President's Corner," and in his March Corner, he included an item about "cheap broadband service available from Space Data Corporation by



## Help Still Needed and Upcoming Meetings

CMUG is still in need of a Program Coordinator. Despite the list below, we have had people offer to do meeting presentations. But without a central coordinator, it's hard for me to know who is coming, which makes it hard to tell you!

The meeting presentations are an important part of the educational mission of our user group. The Program Coordinator acts as a central contact point, and confirms meeting dates with the speaker. So, this is an important job.

On the other hand, it's not especially time consuming; we only have 11 presentations a year, after all, and most of the communication can be done via email. If you have questions about the workload or are otherwise interested, please speak with one of the officers at the meeting.

**July 16:** To be determined

**August 20:** To be determined

**September 17:** To be determined

**October 15:** To be determined

## Windows SIG

### June 24 Meeting

#### "Ubuntu and Windows Can Co-exist"

The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month, except in December. The SIG focuses on using and maintaining Windows, all platforms. We take questions, present tips and techniques, demonstrate freeware/shareware and even feature some web topics using a little trickery.

The topic for the June meeting is "Ubuntu and Windows Can Co-exist." If you have a suggestion for a topic for a future SIG meeting, please email Mike Hayes at [mikes\\_line@hotmail.com](mailto:mikes_line@hotmail.com).

Remember that the meetings are at the Florence Bain Senior Center, and begin at 7 pm. See the CMUG website at [www.myCMUG.org](http://www.myCMUG.org) for maps and directions.

way of shoebox sized transmitter/receivers carried aloft via ten balloons launched each day by ranchers and dairy farmers.” Sound fishy to you?

I surprised Bill with a phone call to inquire and he said he also wondered about that, but later was astonished to read it in their local newspaper. He even sent me an article taken from the Wall St. Journal about the company. Here’s the URL to read that President’s Corner (<http://pcgroup.nwark.com/pres-38.htm>) on their website. Space Data Corporation has this interesting Wall Street Journal article ([www.spacedata.net/news022008.htm](http://www.spacedata.net/news022008.htm)) up on their own website; it talks about the company’s balloon-based system, which currently provides data services for truckers and oil companies. You’ll find it fascinating.

The Boca Raton users group just lost their long-time ISP so maybe they should consider this method with various members launching the balloons each day. <G> That’s another way to beat the big guys.

Anyway, I had a very interesting visit with Bill Shook and you’d be surprised to know he publishes most of his interesting newsletter using a DOS version of Word Perfect (5.1), but does use MS Windows XP every day. How many editors would you find sticking with their favorite DOS program yet today? I assume his philosophy is “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Sort of like “in with the new,” but not necessarily “out with the old.” He said that like many other user groups, not many members write articles/reviews for their newsletter any more and is indebted to Judy Tylour for putting the APCUG editor articles together; as well as to APCUG’s Ira Wilsker and his articles. He also thanked the “World Renowned DealsGuy.”

### What a Show!

I worked the Sapphire Show by SAP and it includes the SAP Users Group organization (see [www.sap.com/us/sapphire](http://www.sap.com/us/sapphire)). It was a large show in the West Concourse of the Orange County Convention Center. All the SAP partners, along with Microsoft and their partners, were there. There was food set up all over the exhibit floor from the time the show opened in the AM to the close at 5 PM. No food concession stands were open in the building. The dock I worked at was one entry point for the food to be brought in so I managed to get a snack more often than I should have.

I visited the exhibit floor briefly twice and it was interesting. I was really curious about what the “War rooms” were that were associated with the IT section. Eric Clapton was the featured entertainer one

evening and Tom Brokaw (legendary ABC newsman) was the speaker another evening. This show usually comes here each year and is attended by people from around the world.

We also worked an IBM show, held at the Dolphin hotel on Disney property. They recently had a show that I didn’t get to see, and now this one, which is their Tivoli Pulse08 show ([www.ibm.com/tivoli/pulse08](http://www.ibm.com/tivoli/pulse08)). Lance Armstrong was one of the featured speakers, and Hootie and the Blowfish entertained on the final evening. They packed a lot of exhibitors on the show floor; many had a “booth on a post” (a post with a shelf for equipment) that took up a very small area and the rest of the booths were still quite small. 4000 attendees were expected. IBM has another show there in two weeks: The IBM Rational Software Development Conference.



### No Announcements with Discounts This Month

I did receive a number of announcements, but nothing new offering us a product discount. Those will be posted on my website. As you can see, my column is mostly personal items that I thought were of interest and I will include some freebies sent to me by readers. I have also seen these in columns published in a few UG newsletters. There are several good

monthly “help” articles and I only get a few newsletters, but some of these columns are reprinted in newsletters I do receive. I hope you get some good from these suggestions.

### How About Some Suggestions for Defragging!

This is a freeware defragging utility that was said to be a good product. I have not used it yet, but I’m passing it on to you. It is called SpeedDefrag 5.2.1 and is located at [www.majorgeeks.com/download4889.html](http://www.majorgeeks.com/download4889.html). I’m not sure if it’s Adware or Freeware. There is also a free Windows Registry Cleaner there, but I don’t know how it compares with cCleaner.

### Another Free Defrager

Here is another free defragging product. Go to [www.auslogics.com/en/software](http://www.auslogics.com/en/software). This item was in an article by Joe Shipley, owner of Smart Ideas, a computer consultant firm.

Auslogics also offers two other free products; Registry Defrag and System Information, which gives you data about your computer. There are also some products you must pay for.

### Free Picture Resizer

Resize, shrink and crop your pictures for



# Why I Like Ubuntu

by Phil Vogel, via APCUG

My interest in alternative operating systems started 20 years ago when I worked for the State of Maryland during a year of computer chaos. We had a good office system using WordPerfect but some high state official(s) made a decision to go with Microsoft Word. At our facility WordPerfect was no longer funded and we were no longer able to use it. However, our mental facility didn't have the budget to buy Word for all of our computers, only a few.

Thus my co-workers and I became interested in alternative sources of software. One of the writing programs that we used was the predecessor of OpenOffice and not very good. And because of the high prices charged for an inferior product (Word compared to WordPerfect) at the time, we looked to finding an alternative Operating System to Microsoft products. I remember investigating Red Hat distribution of Red Hat Linux at the time. But at



the time it was not up to par with Microsoft's Windows 95.

When I joined OMUG, I was delighted to find that there was a Linux SIG. "Linux" is a term for many operating systems (OS) using the Linux "kernel" or "heart" or "engine." The kernel "drives" the system like a car engine powers a car. Conrad Schuler, one of the leaders of the Linux SIG, was promoting SUSE, a "distribution" of Linux which originally came from Germany. Paul Braget, another leader, liked Ubuntu. When I joined, I found I was totally lost. However, I stuck it out and some of the understanding and data is beginning to stick to the walls of my mind.

I listened, worked on the Linux programs on the computers in the Senior Center, and became convinced that I wanted to try it out for myself. I like laptops. I can grab a computer and move it to a room or across the country easily. In this country all computers are Microsoft-friendly but only some brands and some models of the other brands such as Dell are Linux-compatible.

I decided after some research to take a chance on a new Toshiba Qosmio. We had difficulty installing SUSE and because of inexperience it became corrupted. However, it was easier to install Ubuntu.

"Ubuntu" is a South African word which means, "I am because you are." I am writing this article because you are here, OMUG. I am using Ubuntu because a lot of people around the world contribute to its innovation, maintenance, and security. By the way, the Toshiba came with Windows Vista Home Edition. I only use it for QuickBooks; that is, I can boot into Vista when I need to, but use Ubuntu most of the time.

I use Ubuntu to surf the web because it has a very secure hard kernel. It is almost impossible to attack a Linux-based machine because all the software programs are attached to the outside of the kernel. At most a particular program will become dysfunctional but not the operating system. For this reason about 90 percent of the servers around the world use Linux-based software. Some servers are so reliable that service is minimal.

The Linux kernel is simple, clean and fast, allowing me to turn it on and be on the web in a fraction of the time required by my Windows machine. My web browser is FireFox, an excellent free program.

I am writing this article with OpenOffice because it is another excellent writing program that is on a par with Microsoft Office. And it is a free program also. I must admit that Microsoft's "Access" program is superior to



free. Resize photos before posting them on whatever website you choose. See [www.picsize.com](http://www.picsize.com). Since I have not tried it, I can't offer much of a description. However, they do the resizing for you right there.

## Analyze Everything in Your PC

Here's a free utility that can be used to analyze and even benchmark your computer. It offers information on hardware, including such things as motherboard, CMOS, processor, memory, the display adapter, keyboard, mouse and all types of drivers. Also shows any peripheral devices connected (such as printer, multimedia devices) PCI/AGP buses, I/O ports, DMA channels, IRQs, Advanced Power Management, memory, resources, DirectX, DirectDraw, DirectSound and the list goes on.

They say it's easy to use and offers an attractive interface. See [www.freshdevices.com/freshdiag.html](http://www.freshdevices.com/freshdiag.html) to download it. Before you decide, look at the pro and con remarks on [download.com](http://download.com).

## That's It for This Month

I'll have some new product announcements on my website ([www.dealsguy.com](http://www.dealsguy.com)). Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound.

- Bob (The Cheapskate) Click  
bobclick at mindspring dot com



# Personal Health Records

## Google Offers Free Medical Records Service

by Ira Wilsker, via APCUG

### Websites:

- ↪ [www.google.com/health](http://www.google.com/health)
- ↪ <https://www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html>
- ↪ [www.keyt.com/news/local/19222464.html](http://www.keyt.com/news/local/19222464.html)

Google recently started offering free public access to the beta version of its “Google Health” service at [www.google.com/health](http://www.google.com/health). This service offers users access to a comprehensive user-created database where the user can selectively store medical records. In addition to the storage of personal medical records, Google Health also allows for the importation of medical and prescription records from a variety of services, and the voluntary exportation of medical records to several diagnostic services. Google Health allows user-approved physicians, hospitals, pharmacists, and other healthcare services to access the medical records.

To open a free account at Google Health requires registration; users with existing Google accounts may use their existing usernames and

passwords for access. Once registered, opening the website at [google.com/health](http://google.com/health) offers the users an intuitive menu. The primary links in the center column of the page are:

- ↪ Add to this Google Health profile (Learn about your health issues and find helpful resources)
- ↪ Import medical records (Copy and get automatic updates of your records)
- ↪ Explore online health services (Find online tools for managing your health)
- ↪ Find a doctor (Search by name, location, and specialty)

On the left column of the opening page are hyperlinks to personal profile information, and the right column displays a profile summary.

Clicking on “Add to this Google Health profile” opens a menu with the headings “Conditions”, “Medications”, “Allergies”, “Procedures”, “Test results”, and “Immunizations”. Under “Conditions” a condition or symptom can be entered in the search box, or the user can click on any condition in a lengthy alphabetical list to “Add” that condition to the user’s profile.

Many of the conditions have a “Reference” link that will provide more information on the condition, as well as any symptoms and treatments. The “Medications” heading allows users to enter both prescription and non-prescription medications, vitamins and minerals, as well as herbal products. The search box displays selections as the product name is typed, or an alphabetical directory can be accessed. “Allergies”, “Procedures”, “Test results”, and “Immunizations” are entered in the same manner as “Medications” and “Conditions”, with a search box or alphabetical menu.

The main page selection “Import medical records” allows the user to securely import medical and prescription records from a variety of sources, including clinics, laboratories, and pharmacies. Included on the currently short list of such resources are Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Cleveland Clinic, CVS Minute Clinics, Quest Diagnostics, Medco, RX America, Longs Drugs, and Walgreen’s. It is clear in reading about the service that this small listing is in its infancy, as Google Health is trying to sign up additional partners.

To experiment with importing data, I clicked on the link for the prescription manager Medco, which is used by my health insurance plan. Clicking on the “Link to profile” icon under the Medco listing opened the secure Medco website where I had to enter the username and password I use at Medco. Seconds after approving the transfer of my prescription history, it appeared on my Google Health profile under “Medications”. The information transferred to Google Health by Medco was not just the



### OpenOffice's “Data.”

All the above programs are “open source” which means that you can obtain them for free by a download, or on DVD or CD for a nominal charge. However, there are also companies that will supply a person with disks, manuals and service contract just like Microsoft. But everyone is bound by the EULA of the “open source” contract, including companies and also users like me. For instance anyone who comes up with a change or improvement must make it available to any one else for free.

So this is why I like Ubuntu, FireFox and OpenOffice. I also use other features such as watching movies, burning DVD's, and WiFi—and they work well. Now I want to edit and burn a homemade movie.

Ubuntu also has an extensive Internet support system. New programs and updates are coming out all the time. It is an example of a technology rising up from the grassroots rather than from the top down.

*This article comes to us from APCUG, the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which CMUG is a member. Phil Vogel is Director at Large of the Olympia Microcomputer User Group ([www.oly mug.org](http://www.oly mug.org)) in Washington state. He can be reached via email at [director3\(at\)oly mug.org](mailto:director3(at)oly mug.org).*





prescriptions I ordered from Medco, but also recent prescriptions I filled at local pharmacies where insurance was claimed. Medco can automatically update my profile as new prescriptions are entered and filled. Items filled at local pharmacies under their respective \$4 or \$5 generic program, where no insurance was filed, did not appear on the Medco list.

The menu item “Explore online health services” opens a list of over a dozen services that offer online personal health services. These health services, which can be linked to Google Health and utilize the information provided to Google Health (but only with the express consent of the user!), include such well known services as the Cleveland Clinic, the American Heart Association “Heart Attack Risk Calculator”, “MyCareTeam- Diabetes” diabetes management system (requires monthly or annual subscription), and several other services. While several of these personalized services are free, others are fee-based. Most of the services listed require some form of registration in order to use those services and integrate them with the user’s Google Health information.

The “Find a doctor” link opens a simple pair of search boxes, the first (left) of which is a directory of specialties, and the second box (on the right) is where the user can enter a zip code, city, or other information in order to generate a listing of physicians, chiropractors, and specialists that meet the selected criteria. The listings provided included physician or practice name, address, and phone number, as well as links to the practice website (if any), driving directions from Google Maps, and a link to “Save to medical contacts”.

Once information is entered, a personal profile is created, and Google Health makes several analyses. One that may be critically important shows up in the left column on the main page with the label “Drug Interactions” with a red exclamation point if there is a potentially dangerous interaction between prescription and non-prescription drugs, vitamins, and herbals. On my personal page there is one advisory about a synergetic effect between two of my medications that says “Discuss with your doctor soon” (this effect is desirable in my case), and another interaction between three of my non-prescription medications that is labeled with a red icon “Requires immediate attention” (I already checked, and it is OK in my case).

### Confidentiality

In its privacy statement ([www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html](http://www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html)), Google Health explains the confidentiality of the information entered, and how it will not be released or shared with any third party without the express consent of the user. By my personal choice, I would be willing to allow my personal physician (if he participated), as well as any

specialists or hospitals that I visit, to access my information. It could be a great time saver to allow them to access my medical records online, rather than me having to complete hand written forms at each office I visit.

Because of its inherent completeness, this online “Personal Health Record” (PHR) can also be a lifesaver by providing healthcare establishments instant access to medical histories, medications, and allergies. A voluntary service like Google Health (or Microsoft’s upcoming competing service “HealthVault”, or Steve Case’s “Revolution Health”) could be very useful. It’s easy to keep up-to-date, and the accurate health profile benefits both the user and healthcare providers (again, assuming they’ve been approved for access by the user).

It should be noted that there are always security and privacy risks of posting sensitive information, such as health records, online. Hackers could penetrate the security of any establishment or server that stores or accesses sensitive personal information. While I know that they are not perfect, I basically trust Google Health with my information.

There are many other “PHR” systems and services in use, often administered by corporations for their employees; others are offered by health insurance companies, as well as some regional PHR services. Google Health has the reputation and distribution (as well as the deep pockets) to create and securely maintain a nationwide system, and sign up participating partners who are willing to allow the sharing of medical records.

I knowingly volunteered to post my medical records on Google Health. I hope the project succeeds, and more local physicians, pharmacies, labs, and hospitals partner with the service. As more healthcare providers transition to purely digital medical records, it will become easier to securely share this vital information.

*This article comes to us from APCUG, the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which CMUG is a member. Ira Wilsker is an APCUG Director and radio and TV show host in Beaumont TX. He can be reached via email at [iwilsker\(at\)apcug.net](mailto:iwilsker(at)apcug.net).*

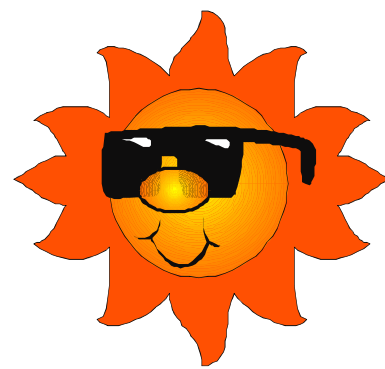


[Ed. Note: This article reminded me of a classic Dilbert cartoon, excerpted here. See more at [Dilbert.com](http://Dilbert.com).]

# CMUG MEGAPHONE

George Coffin  
8652 Open Meadow Way  
Columbia, MD 21045

Meeting:  
**Wednesday, June 18, 7:30 pm**  
**Elections!** And Dave Whittle on useful  
software and hardware he's discovered  
over the years.



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General meetings are held the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm at the Florence Bain Senior Center, near the Harpers Choice Village Center in Columbia MD. The number there is 410-313-7213.

Membership in the user group is currently \$30 (cheap!). Membership includes a monthly subscription to the CMUG Megaphone, occasional drawings for free and review software at meetings, and the sure and certain knowledge that you are helping to keep CMUG up and running.

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