



INNER CIRCUITS

A Technology Newsletter for Extension Specialists

Extension Technology and Computer Services, UMC
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Empowered Frustration

by Bill McFarland



I had about three acres of fescue and an old red Farmall Cub tractor empowered with a 5-foot sickle mower when I lived in the county. I mowed that field every year for the potential hay. I hired a neighbor to come over and bale it. Between my mower and his baler, we spent as much time fixing and fighting the machines as it took to produce the product. Computers are like that sometimes. It takes as long fighting with the machine as it

takes to produce the product. But that was the only way I was going to make hay from that grassy field, within my budget.

The mission of ETCS is to empower University Outreach and Extension faculty and staff with information technology appropriate to their needs, within necessary funding constraints. We want to lead UO/E into the use of appropriate technology at an acceptable stress level. We do care about you and can identify with your frustration levels. We don't intend to empower frustration, but...

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

- Computers cause change; change causes stress; therefore, computers cause stress.
- Computers cause stress; stress causes frustration; therefore, computers cause frustration.

However:

- Computers create possibilities; possibilities create potential; therefore, computers create potential.
- Computers create potential; potential raises expectations; therefore, computers raise expectations.
- Computers raise expectations; expectations could go unmet causing frustration; therefore, computers could cause frustration.

But:

- Computers lock-up, everything else is just frustrating!



Probable Lock-ups

If you are in one of the county extension offices, some of the perceived lockups are not truly lockups at all. Perhaps they should be called VERY long pauses in computer time. For instance, an e-mail that you have received may have a file attached. If that file is around 1 MB in size and you decide to double click on that file to open it, it could take as long as 4 - 5 minutes to open. This is the result of trying to move that 1 MB document from the network on campus to your computer over the dedi-

Enjoy your
Labor Day

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Lincoln University,
U.S. Department of Agriculture
& Local University Extension
Councils Cooperating

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cated 56Kb line. This direct connection is faster than the old dial up (modem) method of computer communications, but not exactly instantaneous. The unfortunate part is Outlook doesn't tell you that you are waiting. So you think you've waited FOREVER, and re-boot your machine, *frustrated*.

You can tell how large an attachment is before you double click on it to open it. If the message was sent to you in plain text format, the attachment is at the end, under a line. In this format the size is displayed with the filename. If the message was sent in any other format than plain text, then you see the filename only. Right click on the attachment icon and select Properties. The name and size will be displayed in a pop-up window. At least then you will know what to expect, about 5 minutes per 1 Mega-byte of file.

What can we do about this? DEMAND that your colleagues not attach a file to an e-mail that is larger than 100KB. Campus folks would be the most likely offenders since they have fast network connections, and don't see the problem of large attachments. When a large file needs to be shared, encourage users to transfer it to the S: share drive. It will still take you 4 minutes or more to copy the 1 MB file to your computer, but you will see the little graphic moving the data from one folder to the next and even an estimate on how long it is going to be before it is finished. *Less frustrating*, because without this network you would have to drive over to the other county/campus, put the file on your floppy disk and drive back. Or wait 2-3 days for the Post Office to deliver it to your office. How frustrating would that be?

Lock-ups

Occasionally, you will get a lock-up. Suddenly your keyboard and mouse are useless, generating no response from your computer. You just see a blinking (literally) cursor, no waiting hourglass. You notice that the disk drive light is not lighting up, and that there are no noises coming from the computer unit. The screen is just "locked-up". The standard best practice at this point is: go get a drink of water, go to the restroom, walk around the building once and come back to the computer. (This won't help the computer much, but it is good for your health). If you can verify that nothing has happened since you left, then you have a lock-up. Then, while holding the <Control> and <Alt> keys down, press and let up on the <Delete> key. *Probably* you will get a

pop-up window that identifies all programs running in your computer at this time. *Probably* the top one on the list will have some parenthesis at the end saying (not responding). This is a task that has gotten out of whack in your computer, and can't figure out what to do next. You can End Task on this program and put it out of its misery. If you are successful in ending this task, then the standard best practice suggests that you should proceed to shut down the computer and begin everything anew. *Probably* trying the exact same thing again will proceed successfully. If not, call ETCS.

If you don't get any response from the <Ctrl><Alt><Delete> process, then you are REALLY locked-up. You *probably* will then need to turn your computer off for 10 seconds and back on at its surge protector. Windows 95 will then scold you for doing so as it starts up again and will *probably* insist on scanning the hard drive to see if there are any errors. It *probably* won't find any errors and will after a while present your normal Desktop screen. In some rare cases it will take this opportunity to rearrange your Desktop icons for you. *Probably* trying the exact same thing will proceed successfully. If not, call ETCS.

Configuration

Why do these real lock-ups occur and what can be done to reduce them? This is our subject for this year. Discounting a real computer hardware problem (broken hard drive), and immediate operator error (hitting the wrong button), the configuration of your computer is a significant factor in reducing the probability of computer lock-up. The next article addresses our re-establishment of a set of preferred configuration guidelines for computer health.

Preferred Configuration

by Bill McFarland

ETCS' goal is to reduce computer lock-ups and thereby reduce frustration. We want to re-establish a best-practice configuration for each of your computers. By doing this, it is our intention, to create an environment where your computer will run as smoothly as possible. The preferred configuration

includes what software is installed and how it is set up with options and features. There are certain things we know will increase the probability of a lock-up, so we will try to eliminate these. There are other things that we believe will reduce the probability of a lock-up, so we will try to encourage these.

To achieve this goal, we will be making a *virtual visit* to your computer beginning in September. We will be using SMS to support this virtual visit, using your direct connection to the network as our path to your computer. We will rely on a familiar telecommunications technology to reach out and touch (otherwise known as the telephone). As we talk to your computer, we will be talking with you, via the phone. You can help us with what we are going to be doing to the configuration at hand. We can not connect to your computer without your permission, and we will not do anything to it that you do not agree with.

As has been stated, computers create possibilities and in considering the possibilities we become creative. One of the quotables from a RITS meeting was, "How is it that someone who can't figure out how to copy files can figure out how to get a screen saver of the Rocky Mountains installed?" That's empowered creativity. We certainly don't want to squash creativity. But we want you to know more about what you are creating, and some of the consequences.

And then there is the computer virus issue. Having taken the popular path of Exchange mail, and MS Office 97 we are most susceptible to macro viruses passed along through e-mail. We need to protect ourselves as much as possible from these hazards. That protection uses up computer resources at every desktop. Configuration of that protection is significant for computer performance.

For those of you who enjoy thinking about these things, there will be a web page describing the details of our preferred configuration for the Pentiums and another for the 486s at <http://etcx.ext.missouri.edu>.

We at ETCS hope this will help boost your productivity with your computer and reduce the frustration. We look forward to our virtual visit with you in the near future.

CBT Statistics

by Kristie Sapp



CBT (Computer Based Training) has been up and running for a few months now. I bet you are wondering how everyone's been doing? I've been sending out quite a few Lego® Certificates and I would like to congratulate the top three achievers listed below with their comments about CBT.

Janet Adams, Lawrence County, 12 Lego® Certificates - "The CBT training is much more convenient and I find that I have learned as much as I do at the on-site trainings."

Lori Atkinson, Nevada Telecenter, 9 Lego® Certificates - "I have enjoyed the CBT courses and found them very beneficial in my work. Thanks for all the effort you have put forth in getting this out to us."

Jacqueline Lycke, Law Enforcement Training Institute, 8 Lego® Certificates - "I was very impressed with the CBT courses..."

Let's see if they can stay on top! Check out what your other colleagues have been doing.

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Started</u>	<u>Passed</u>
Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0	23	12
Beginning Word 97	110	43
Beginning Excel 97	35	20
Beginning Access 97	33	11
Intermediate Word 97	54	24
Intermediate Excel 97	15	7
Intermediate Access 97	7	4
Advanced Word 97	36	20
Advanced Excel 97	8	4
Advanced Access 97	5	3
Word 97 For Power Users	15	8
Excel 97 For Power Users	5	1
Access 97 For Power Users	10	3
<u>PowerPoint 97</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>9</u>
Total	384 *	169

Not bad!! Keep your eyes open for those Lego® towers "coming to a desk near you". You might even want to start thinking about building your own. Keep up the good work! Your computer skills are bound to improve!!

* Of the 384 Courses Started there are 141 different students.

Inventory Check

by Jeanne Meyer



ETCS will be preparing inventory sheets for each office to be checked for accuracy. These checklists will include computers, printers, digital cameras, and projectors that have been assigned U.IDs which we are required to keep track of. There are a large number of computers that are considered “old” – IBM PC, IBM PS/Value-Point, IBM PS/2 Model 40, as well as many more—that are still listed as being in use. Neither University inventory records nor ETCS inventory records show that these computers have been surplused, cannibalized, sold, etc. Plans are to locate this equipment by contacting the last person/office associated with the equipment and if not actually in use, recommend surplusing or find out what happened to the equipment or where the item is currently located.

These inventory sheets will also serve as a way to make sure all equipment that is being used is in our inventory database. If your office has purchased computers which are connected to your network, ETCS needs this information.

Training Schedule

By Kristie Sapp

Can you believe it? Summer is just about over. Where have the days gone? I know everyone is starting to settle down from all the fairs and can start to think

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about attending a training class or two, right? The following classes will be held in the ETCS training room, 22 Heinkel Building.

September

- 14th - **PowerPoint Workshop** - 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- 28th - **Advanced Publisher 98** - 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- 29th - **Advanced Word** - 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

October

- 5th - **Publisher 98 Workshop** - 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

To sign-up for one of these sessions, contact ETCS by telephone at 573-882-2096 or send an e-mail to ETCS@missouri.edu. I will post detailed outlines of these courses on our website under training <http://etcs.ext.missouri.edu>

The following class will be held at the TCRC’s. Information on this ITV was mailed to each county and region office. If you need further information, contact ETCS at 573-882-2096 or send an e-mail to ETCS@missouri.edu.

August

31st - **ITV for My Mail List**

- A.M. Session: 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- P.M. Session: 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
- (work on your own files)

NOTE: Do you have a specific training need that is not being filled? Send an e-mail to ETCS@missouri.edu with your suggestion and we will see what we can do.

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Inner Circuits Mailing List Corrections/Additions - Send an e-mail message to ETCS or call 573-882-2096 to correct an address, add someone to or delete someone from the mailing list.