**10 EASY STEPS TO BECOMING**

**A COMPUTER GEEK**

This is not a how-to-article. There are

loads of books for “dummies,” “idiots”

and even a few for us of slightly above

average intelligence. The purpose of this

article is to point you to the areas where

you can make the best use of the mountain

of self-help cyber-books on the market.

**Use Templates.** A template is a preformatted

dummy document. Most word processing

programs come with a wide selection for

various purposes (business letter, fax,

memo, etc). These templates usually come

with styles already defined

so you do not have to tab

and spacebar characters

across the page, just

select the text and

click on the style

menu. You can also

modify most templates

or create your own

from scratch. MS

Word’s “Help” menu

or “Wizard” will show

you how to use

templates.

**Install Acrobat**

**Reader** to view

Portable Document

Files (PDF), a cross

platform format. You can download it for

free from www.adobe.com and it installs

in seconds. This file format is rapidly

replacing the fax machine. PDF files

retain graphics, fonts and layout without

additional installation or page layout

software to view them. They also print

very nicely. To become a super geek, buy

Adobe Acrobat for about $70 to create

your own PDFs, them sell your fax machine.

**Learn to Macro.** Macro, a term that is

often misunderstood, is a mini program

or more accurately a routine that you can

create and assign to an F-key or combination

of key strokes. It can be written in applications

or at the system level (Mac system

macros are called Apple Scripts). Let’s say

you type the same string of words, such as

“With kind regards, Jan Doe” fifty times

each day. You can record a macro so that

those words will be automatically typed

with one keystroke. MS Word 5.0 and

above is equipped with Autotype, an easy

to use macro feature. Macros are also handy

for use in spread-sheets, page layout

documents and routines like checking

e-mail or backing up files.

**Organize Your E-mail.** If you dump all of

your saved e-mail messages in one folder

or directory, I’ll bet you a gigabyte to a

kilobyte you have wasted many hours

looking for a bit of information in an

e-mail message you received x number

of days or months ago. What if all your

paper files were dumped in a big cardboard

box? It is so easy to create a filing system

to sort your archived messages that there

is no reason not to do it. Also, when it is

time to clean house, that chore is so much

less painful.

**Use V-cards.** They are the next step up from

signature files. They attach automatically

to your outgoing e-mail messages just like

signature files. The advantage is that

the recipients of your message can

automatically insert your contact

data into their address

books by clicking on

the attached v-card.

I use Netscape

Messenger for

e-mail and created

multiple v-cards

through the

preferences menu.

Your e-mail

client software

can probably

do the same.

Usually different

e-mail applications

cannot read other application v-cards

but there are shareware programs that

provide a conversion option. The

alternative is to type or copy and paste

new addresses into your address book.

I hate to type.

**Free Internet Services** contradict the

“no free lunch” theory. They truly are free.

I use internet e-mail, calendar and web

storage services. I use Netscape E-mail and

Calendar so I can access my messages and

appointments from any computer, anytime,

anywhere in the world. I use web storage

at www.netdrive.com to distribute photos

and short stories to friends. Many mail

servers have limitations for attachments

but downloading from an internet FTP

(File Transfer Protocol) is 100 percent

reliable and much quicker.

**Maximize Your Memory.** One of the best

ways to get more out of your computer is

to make sure you have enough Random

Access Memory (RAM) to run the new

software on your PC. When I bought my

first memory upgrade, I paid $400 for 4

megabytes. Chip prices have since fallen

from $100 to just a few dollars per megabyte.

This may shock you but YOU can install

your own memory chips. It’s as easy as

screwing in a light bulb, and much easier

than changing the fluorescent lamps in

our office.

**Use Shortcuts** which are now available on

Windows-based PC’s. Mac users have long

been acquainted with “aliases” or remote

launching icons to access often used

applications or documents. Create

shortcuts on your desktop and organize

them so you can find them. So much time

is wasted digging through directories and

folders, searching for files that are updated

every day. Mac users can dump all of their

shortcuts (aliases) into the Apple Menu

Items folder, thereby leaving a clean

desktop. Perhaps one of you other PC

power users can share a similar trick for

Windows.

**Optimize and Defragment your hard disk.**

When you write and erase files to your C

drive or hard disk, the files do not always

fit in one contiguous block of media.

Gaps occur and files may be written to

two, three or many areas of the disk. This

is known as fragmentation. Defragmentation

is accomplished with utility software that

rewrites the files in uninterupted,

contiguous streams, eliminating wasted

free space between the files. System files

and directories are written on the fastest

portion of the disk. This process is called

optimization. Over time, you will

experience an increased sluggishness in

your computer which usually indicates

it is time to defragment and optimize.

Norton Utilities is an excellent choice

to do this.

**Explore Your Computer.** There is so

much more than meets the eye. Take

time to dig into the menus that puzzle

you. Make it an adventurous game. I

know how hard it is for many of you

Type-A workaholics to have nonscheduled

fun at the office but, trust me,

the dividends are worth it. When you try

to figure something out to complete a task

to meet a deadline, it never seems like

fun but if you take a little down time to

putz around, you will discover very

useful stuff.

I understand that these tips may be

some-what simple-minded to many of

you. Still, I never cease to be amazed at

how many of us work with these contraptions

day-in and day-out, thinking we

know what we are doing when unexpectedly,

a kind, helpful soul taps us on the shoulder

and says, “You want to know an easier

way to do that?”

*Source: David Rood*