

Computer Tech Talk -- By Dennis Henson

Why Would You Want a Computer At Home?

While brainstorming for this second *Computer Tech Talk*, I listed 10 areas and 50 tasks that a personal computer (PC) can do at home. A home PC is the only way you can do some of the tasks listed here. Look for what you need in this list. Refer to *Computer Tech Talk Definitions* printed in this issue to better understand the computer jargon used here.

The Connection: Some PC tasks can be done without any connection to the internet. Some tasks just need a slow dial-up connection. Most full-featured applications require high-speed broadband internet access, usually DSL from your local phone company, or broadband from your local cable TV provider.

Note: Most PC applications are cost free after the initial PC setup and software purchases. There is a recurring monthly internet connection fee

Word Processing: Old fashion typing with a twist -- PCs remember what you type. Edit mistakes before you print and let the PC check your spelling and grammar. Type weekly church bulletins, letters, school reports, recipes, and presentations.

Entertainment: PCs are good for playing games; action games, card games, and board games. You can create your own Karaoke CDs, download music (legally!) to play. Make music CDs and watch videos. Pop in your favorite DVD and watch a movie.

Finance: Manage your finances and track your net worth. Do your own taxes without math errors (only if you don't need professional assistance). File your taxes electronically for a faster refund. View your bank account online. Track your stocks. Pay your bills online (no post office trip, no stamps). Pay as late as the due date in some instances. Inspect your credit card activities 24/7.

Immediate News and Info: Read many city newspapers for free. Watch network news stories. Look at the local weather radar in near real-time. Read the local weather forecast and have the daily forecast electronically mailed to you.

Communications: Correspond with distant

friends and family as often as you like via electronic mail for free. Send mail whenever you feel like it. Read mail when you have the time. Your mail message will be in the recipients "in-box" waiting for them to read when they have time. Send pictures, sound clips, even *short* videos of special events in your life to people far away. Chat (instant message) with your friends by typing, talking, or video telephony (webcamming). Post a web log of events of your life to share with friends (blogging). Correspond with government agencies. Write your congressman. Use your high speed internet connection for long distance phone calls for a flat monthly fee.

Education: Do your homework online. Get tutoring. I help my daughter with her calculus homework on the internet. We use an "electronic chalkboard" and can chat just like she is in the room, but she is 150 miles away. Look up timely information about your school. Take a technical course or college course online. Use the KY Virtual Library or large metropolitan libraries for research online. Clarify health issues. Look up prescription drug information. Read wellness information. Install a CD based encyclopedia on your PC (major brands are inexpensive). Search the Bible. Own your own extensive computerized Bible study reference library at low cost. Use visual geography tools to see a satellite image of a distant city. Investigate road conditions. View live traffic cameras for travel congestion in your area.

Buying and Selling: Comparison shop dozens of vendors without leaving your easy chair. Buy online, often with a discount. Sell items you no longer need through online auction houses. Thousands of dollars per month of buying and selling happen online in Cumberland County each and every month. We have online book sellers and even hunting dogs have been sold online. Remember one person's junk is another person's treasure. The world wide scope of the internet lets you reach interested people.

Internet Security: In about every aspect of life, there are con artists and scammers waiting to take advantage. The internet is no different. Make sure you understand how to safeguard your private information against identity theft. Never provide sensitive information without knowing the recipient and making sure the information is encrypted during transmission. Make sure you know how to protect your PC from spyware and computer viruses. Security is a very important topic. Later this year, an entire *Computer Tech Talk* will discuss personal security issues.

Physical Security: Use a home PC to enhance physical security for you and your family. Remote cameras and PC based recording systems are now available at a reasonable cost with do-it-yourself installation possible. You can view the video live from any remote location with broadband internet access (ensure password protection). Use your PC to make a list and organize important account numbers, financial records, PINs, and access passwords. Remember to password protect this collection.

Finding Things: Do you need replacement parts, or need some help from the manufacturer? Use electronic mail to communicate with vendors for replacement parts, warranty repair, tips and how-to's. Look at a product review and learn about upgrades.

Special Applications: Scan, store, enhance and print digital photographs. Conduct genealogy research online and document your findings using a genealogy computer program. Compose, print, and perform music (digitally). Capture and edit your own movies.

Modern PCs have a variety of applications that can make your life easier and keep you more informed. Future articles in *Computer Tech Talk* will discuss these applications in detail. Consider joining us on the information highway.

Questions and comments about this article may be emailed to: hcs@mchsi.com