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## NEWS AND VIEWS

By Chuck Hajdú

I'm writing this on a Southwest Airlines flight enroute to the City of Lost Wages for the 2009 Consumer Electronics Show. It's good to be heading back to Sin City after having missed the 2008 CES because of the flu from Hell. This year our Emerging Technology Editor is ill and will have to miss the show. We'll miss you Linda.

I wonder if my missing a CES for the first time since 1993 was an omen for what 2008 had in store for us all? Economic collapse, bail outs, housing prices plummeting and the worst full year ever for the MCC receiving review products. Oh well, it's 2009, I'm on the way to CES, we have a new administration in D.C. that promises change (for the better I hope) and maybe the economy will get better too.

This issue will have our 2009 CES show reports, including some of the off site events. We have coverage of CES Unveiled, a pre-show event that provides a preview of

what's supposed to be hot at the show, Lunch@Piero's, the mid-day event at the famous Piero's restaurant and some of our off-site private meetings.

Before we get started I'd like to thank our staff members who covered the show with me, Bayle Emlien and George Harding. They put in long hours and I appreciate their hard work. I'd also like to thank the underappreciated public relations and marketing people we work with that make it possible for us to learn about, and review, the products our readers want to know more about.

The first question everyone always asks me when they know I've been to a trade show is: **what's new and exciting?** Sometimes I have a good answer but many times I'm befuddled, like this year.

The vast majority of the products that we saw were more like incremental changes rather than groundbreaking new experiences. Most companies seemed to be announc-

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## 2009 CES REPORT

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ing products that were hedges in case the world economy stayed in the tank. If things stay slow, then they haven't invested major funds in production because virtually everything was promised for Q2-Q3 (no year mentioned). If things improve drastically then they can ramp up production and get the "new" products in the stream because they're using mostly older technology.

Here are my overall impressions after four days at the 2009 CES:

**Green**— EVERYBODY was announcing their "new" Green policies. It's clearly the Bandwagon-of-the-day and companies big and small were jumping on it. I heard enough green statistics to last several lifetimes. Naturally, we support saving energy, it is extremely important for the long term health of our planet. The temperature patterns over the past ten years show a clear pattern, average temperatures have fallen every year. It's obvious we're on the road to serious **Global Cooling** and if we don't take action we could have another Ice Age.

**Attendees**— Some of the companies we had planned on visiting pulled out at the last minute. Companies actually forfeited the money they had paid for floor space to save the money that sending staff and displays would have cost them. There were large areas of open space this year, not as bad as Comdex in it's last few years, but troubling.



I had a conversation with the manager of the hotel we stayed at during CES and found out some interesting information about attendees. His hotel was virtually booked full months in advance with attendees from the US, Europe and several Asian countries. At the last minute a significant number of people from

overseas cancelled their reservations. Of course, there was nothing he could do about it, it's just the way it is this year. I also talked to people who were staying in the latest uber-hotel, the Wynn Encore, at discount prices because there were so many empty rooms.

Rodeway Convention Center  
220 Convention Center Drive  
Las Vegas, NV 89108  
(702) 435-4151

A 5 minute walk from the LVCC or the Strip and Chuck feels the best customer service in Vegas. Opened May 2008.

**Ch-ch-ch-changes**- As I reflect on the close to 20 years I've been covering trade shows a couple of things really jump out at me. The first one is how information is disseminated.

In the **Stone Age**... you know when dinosaurs roamed the earth, the mid-1990s, virtually everything was on paper. There was so much paper to be moved that FedEx had multiple shipping sites at every show. IBM used to give away hundreds of shipping boxes with drop slots in the sides so attendees could slip in press kits until the box was full. Then you'd take the boxes to the FedEx booths and ship it home. I'm not kidding, that was how things were done.

And then we moved into the **Renaissance**... the smart companies started putting all of their press releases on a floppy disc! Wonderful (mostly because we could reuse 90% of them when we got back to the office!).

Next the **Industrial Revolution**... CD and DVD-ROMs. The amount of information we used to ship in all of those boxes now fit on one disc that was easy to carry. Life is finally getting manageable!

Today were in the **21st Century**... there is still some paper and there are some CD/DVDs but there are no floppy discs anywhere in sight. Today the vast majority of the press releases we received were on USB flash drives. And not just flash drives (itty bitty 8, 16, 32, or 64MB drives) but FLASH DRIVES (512MB and 1GB). We looked at the stack of drives we have to go through to read the press information that we were given and the vast majority of them are 1GB drives! Many of them are the size of a three year old child's pinky finger nail. Moore's Law lives on!

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# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF MULTIMEDIA

## BLACKBERRY CURVE, MSFT VISTA ULTIMATE

By George Harding

### RIM Blackberry Curve

I finally decided to give up my old cell phone, which I had used successfully for some 5 years! After considering various possibilities and trying out a couple of new phones, I decided on a Blackberry. It seemed like one of the most popular instruments being used, particularly by business.

I got the **Blackberry Curve**, the most advanced at the time, and because Costco had a "real deal" on them. What with rebates and being a new customer for AT&T, the phone cost nothing. The monthly charge is more than I had been paying, as you might guess, almost three times as much! But I get a lot more, too.

The features include not only the typical cell phone service, but also email, access to the Internet, access to various ring tones, a camera and the ability to use the device as an MP3 player. I have a full QWERTY keyboard, as well. One of the great things about the Blackberry is the many additional features you can install on it.

For example, I have an applet by ESPN that gives me up-to-the-minute sports news. While I'm not an avid sports fan, it's nice to see what U of A did to-night, or who is in the NFL playoffs.

I also have two GPS mapping applets, which work quite well. I've used them on several trips. They provide directions, or a turn-by-turn map, but no voice. There is also a "where am I?" feature, which may be quite handy if you are lost or disoriented.



George Harding

Another applet that is handy is Yellow Pages. Here, you can look up the location and phone of any business. The app presumes you want to look in your locality, but you can enter a specified location that's different. I found it to be a bit confusing to use.

I have another app that is sometimes useful, TV Guide Mobile.



This is sort of like the print version, with listings by time and channel. The setup includes a question about your cable provider, so you get listings that include all the cable channels, as well as the local stations. There is a search feature by title, keyword or time and channel. There are also other tools to find or remind you of what you want to watch.

Yet another app is the ABC News, which gives you the up-to-date headlines and associated articles. They include thumbnail pictures, as well.

There are so many applications, I couldn't begin to list them all. The Blackberry Owner's Lounge has a section of downloads of various types. To give you an idea of the variety, I catalogued the following: 182 games; 57 productivity, 36 entertainment, 38 travel and more.

This is a wonderful and very popular device. I highly recommend it.

Research In Motion Blackberry Curve Smartphone  
[www.blackberry.com](http://www.blackberry.com)  
 Price normally \$50-\$200 purchase with monthly charges varying with services provided.

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## SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF MULTIMEDIA

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### MSFT Vista Ultimate

Last spring I bought a new notebook computer, the Toshiba Satellite. I got that particular one because it was very light and had a smaller screen. For traveling, the HP notebook I have is too bulky and heavy.

This Toshiba has 2 GB memory, which I hoped would make the operating system faster than is the HP (528 MB). However, the Toshiba came with Vista Home Premium installed, which slows things down somewhat, compared with XP.

Those of us who attended the Southwest Computer Conference in San Diego last May each received a copy of Vista Ultimate from Microsoft. This was a generous gift for the folks from Mindshare!

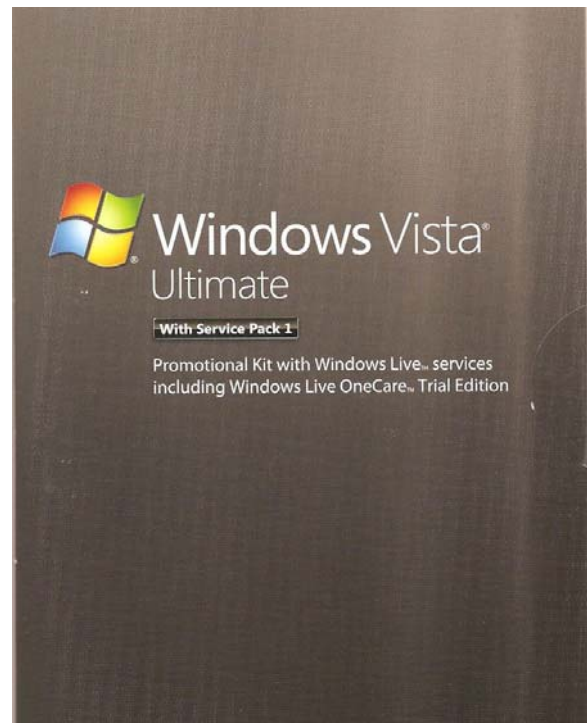
I debated whether to upgrade my Home Premium or to give away Ultimate in the User Group raffle. Finally, I decided to do the upgrade. The hardware passed the test of adequacy, though there's no indication of whether one is well over the minimum or just over. It's a pass/fail sort of test.

I started the upgrade and was advised that it could not be completed unless the power cord was attached. This prevents the upgrade from failing in mid-stream should battery power be exhausted. Attach the cord! The upgrade proceeds.

I had no idea that such an upgrade would take such a long time. In my case, with a pretty fast machine, a large hard drive and lots of memory, it took over 2 hours! I've done many installs/upgrades of Microsoft operating systems over the years, but this one was longer than any other, by a wide margin.

Several restarts were required during the upgrade process. The process did not require user intervention, which was a nice feature. The information that would have been user-provided in a clean install would have already been available.

Well, after all that time, what's different? Not much. The interface looks much the same. There are a few minor differences that aren't that noticeable. For running applications that are minimized, hovering over the task bar icon for the application shows a thumbnail of the window; not of a great deal of use. The screen savers are enhanced; you have the Bubbles



screen saver, which has various sized bubbles floating around the screen, the Aurora screen saver, the Ribbons screen saver and more.

The most hyped feature is being able to show all the open windows in a paged view, sort of like a book with its pages leafed out. This, again, is neat, but not that useful in practice.

Media Center is another feature of Ultimate. While this is a nice feature, and quite fully-functioning, it isn't something that I would normally use.

There are some free downloads that are only available for Ultimate: Hold 'Em Poker (you against the computer); Tinker (a puzzle game); DreamScene (a desktop background using video instead of still images); and Sound Schemes.

All in all, there wasn't much value in the upgrade, at least to me. Microsoft thinks the difference between Premium and Ultimate is worth about \$60. Perhaps so. It certainly is pretty!

Vista Ultimate Upgrade  
<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista>  
 Price \$320 MSRP, Upgrade over Premium \$60

# LUNCH @ PIERO'S

By Chuck Hajdú and Bayle Emlein

Once again Pat Meier Johnson did a superb job of putting together an event that provided us with a diverse group of vendors showing interesting new products. We look forward to her midday event every year, it's a welcome break from the crowds on the show floor. More importantly, it gives us a chance to see new products and discuss them with the vendors one-on-one.



If you are ever in Vegas and want an excellent meal, we highly recommend Piero's. It's only a half block from the LVCC and has some of the best Italian food in the States. I love their Scampi! If you're a bit squeamish about shrimp with their heads still on then go for the calamari, it's tender and delicious.



Once again, **VIA Technologies** had some great new products on display. Last year we were impressed with their incredible ARTiGO A1000 Kit and this year they've topped that with the new **VIA ARTiGO A2000** server. As you can see in the picture below the new A2000 is much larger than the A1000 Kit (on the right) but it needs to be to serve its purpose.

The ARTiGO A2000 barebones kit is intended to work as a server for SOHO users and is designed to be extremely simple to build. The case contains all of the parts you'll need to build a powerful server except for RAM and hard drives.

The system is powered by a VIA 1.7 GHz C7 processor and supports up to 2GB of Ram. The system will hold two 3.5" drives that slip right into the drive slots. And there is a built in ball-bearing



VIA ARTiGO A2000 (left) and ARTiGO A1000 Kit (right)

fan to keep the hard drives cool. From the way it was described to me by Ernie Kwan of VIA, it should be an under one hour project for anyone to put together.

We can't wait to get our hands on a review unit. It may be a while though, we were told they're as scarce as hen's teeth right now. [www.via.com.tw](http://www.via.com.tw)

Shannon Lyman and her team from **Lexmark** were on hand showing some of their latest SOHO professional inkjet and laser printers. Lexmark is making a push this year to try to capture more of the small office and home user laser market. Their new laser printers will be available through normal retail outlets rather than business oriented resellers. The printers are very compact but provide laser printer quality on a budget.



The Lexmark Professional series inkjet all-in-one inkjet printer/fax/scanner units are *very* impressive. The professional series units come with high capacity ink cartridges so you don't have to change ink cartridges nearly as often. In addition they have built in wireless networking and a 5 year warranty! What more can you ask for?

Every one of the Lexmark printers we've tested over the years was great and Lexmark printers are always our first recommendation. [www.lexmark.com](http://www.lexmark.com)

Les Goldberg of **D-Link** had several of their wireless routers on display. We were most impressed by the **D-Link Xtreme Storage Router with Built-in Photo Frame (DIR-685)**, a product that promises to bring the router out of the closet! It's a compact router with a built in video screen that can be used as a digital photo frame! You can keep your router right on your desk top and not look too much like a geek!



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# LUNCH @ PIERO'S

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Both USB ports located on the back of the DIR-685 utilize the new D-Link SharePort technology, enabling multiple users to seamlessly share USB devices - including printers, multi-function printers (MFP), and external hard drives - from any location in the home or office, in a Wi-Fi environment. SharePort turns the local USB ports located on the back of the 802.11n router into a fast and responsive virtual port by utilizing a new technology of USB over TCP/IP.



Les told us the unit will be available in March or April and to us it sounds like it should be a real winner. [www.dlink.com](http://www.dlink.com)

And now for a change of pace. We visited the **CTERA Networks** table and spoke to Amir Rapson, the Director, Embedded SE Development, to find out just what CTERA was. CTERA is developing a new technology aimed at providing your local ISP with a tool to allow data and storage and backup for their clients.

The diagram on the left shows how the system works. The way I understand it, your local ISP buys the CTERA devices, the SOHO user can then store and backup files to wherever the local ISP chooses to save them, on their servers or a third party. The CTERA cloud plug serves as a conduit to the internet. [www.ctera.com](http://www.ctera.com)



While we're in the clouds, let's talk about **Cloud OS**, a small browser operating system for netbooks and PCs. Cloud is a project of the **Good OS** company, makers of gOS. We've tested gOS in the past and found it to be a very good Linux distro.

The Cloud OS works as the boot OS with other Linux or Windows OSs available on the computer. You boot up quickly, have a pleasant desktop to work with and have all of the Cloud web apps available in seconds. Sounds ideal for many users.



The Cloud OS is currently being designed for specific netbook platforms but we were told that "in time" it will be available as a download for other systems. System requirements are a standard x86 CPU, 128MB of RAM and 35MB of storage. [www.thinkgos.com](http://www.thinkgos.com)

Have you ever been a facilitator? You know, the person that stands up in front of a meeting with big sheets of paper, lots of colored markers and push pins and tape. Their job is to keep a meeting on track and organized. If you have, then you know what the **Comapping Mind Map** is all about. Bill Ryan did an excellent job of explaining the concepts behind Comapping to us and showing us in great detail how the software can be used to track individual thoughts and ideas and then organize them. It's classic facilitator work being semi-automated.



The software is web based and nothing resides on the host PC. That makes it easy to use from any computer, provided the PC is connected to the internet. To us this can be a curse as well as a blessing. In the past we've worked as facilitators and very often worked on a project while flying from city to city. The disadvantage of cloud computing right now is that it doesn't work in the real clouds. [www.comapping.com](http://www.comapping.com)

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## LUNCH @ PIERO'S

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**Blendtec** CEO Tom Dixon's demo moved out of the techie realm into consumer home electronics for real. I have no idea why one would want to chop a garden rake to smithereens, but it can be done with an ordinary kitchen appliance. OK, maybe this blender is not so ordinary, but ordinary folks can easily obtain one for a minimal investment. I don't know. Maybe if I have one and threaten my computer, it will behave better. Maybe if I just blend up I nice smoothee, I'll behave better.

[www.blendtec.com](http://www.blendtec.com)

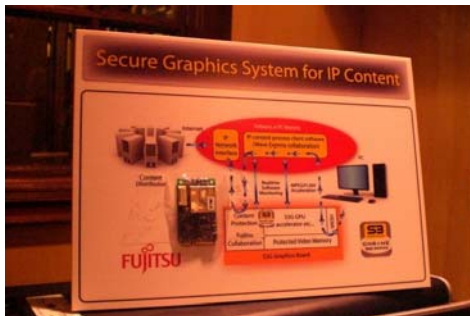


Back to the serious stuff. As usual, **VIA** had a counter full of devices with their chipsets embedded. What could be wrong with a company whose motto is "small is beautiful"? A VIA chipset is enabling the recording of these notes. Short of reading my mind and fixing typos for me, it couldn't be better. VIA continues to be one of the most trusted names in electronics and it's useful to be updated on how many places they find to embed themselves. Being smaller and more efficient than others, they make it possible to design many kinds of more efficient equipment, as Regional Sales Manager Ernie Kwan was pleased to explain.

[www.via.com](http://www.via.com)

**Fujitsu** Senior Research Fellow Kiyoshi Kohiyama explained how Fujitsu partners with S-3 Graphics to provide a secure but connected environment for IP content. Shown on the Phoenix Hyperspace VMPC VM 7700 using Via technology, the seamless collaboration showed how good the future is looking.

[www.s3graphics.com](http://www.s3graphics.com)



Gary Davis showed how **Total Immersion's** augmented reality (AR) enhances the participation ex-

perience by allowing the formerly passive viewer to interact with the display, a product or other experience. AR provides a more vivid experience for the user and allows for a level of participation that approaches virtual reality. Total Immersion also provides a safe practice environment for folks with disabilities, many of whom need extra training in order to successfully navigate the real world.

[www.t-immersion.com](http://www.t-immersion.com)

**Green Plug** was back this year, with its partner Innergie ([www.myinnergie.com](http://www.myinnergie.com)). EVP Paul Panepinto demonstrated the Greentalk™ open systems power interface using the Innergie mCube90G powering a variety of devices. Green Plug is proceeding through the electronics market, creating power adapters to connect to the mCube. Until manufacturers adapt a standard, users have the opportunity to nominate the next device to receive an adapter. This system makes as much as USB, versus the jumble of legacy connectors and interfaces. Do that at [www.IwantMyGreenplug.com](http://www.IwantMyGreenplug.com).

[www.greenplug.com](http://www.greenplug.com)

Todd Blumer of **SDG Systems** explained the OpenMoko totally open application for the mobile phone they have designed. OpenMoko has published specs and is actively looking for value-added partners. As a certain Penguin has demonstrated, this is a viable market model.

[www.openmoko.com](http://www.openmoko.com)

Matt Rowntree explained using **Truephone** to make totally free phone calls using their internet service. Truephone makes landline and mobile phone calls at the lowest rates available. Just in time for CES and Lunch@Pierro's, Truephone has added free WiFi connectivity and instant messaging.

[www.truephone.com](http://www.truephone.com)



**Qik** Business Development and Marketing Manager Rishi Malik showed off the Qik application, which allows live streaming of video from a cell phone. Qik makes it easy to share experiences with friends and family who can't be there with you. Uploads are stored on the Qik servers, making easy to share in real time and to go back to re-experience important moments.

[www.qik.com](http://www.qik.com)

## 2009 CES REPORT

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OK, that's it for my personal news and views on the 2009 CES. Now it's time to start our composite Show Report from our entire staff.

The first event we attended was **CES Unveiled**. It's the official press event of CES and it's held two days before the show actually starts. Unveiled is billed as a sneak peek of the Design & Engineering Showcase and it's held in Venetian Ballroom in the Sands Convention Center. There were enough interesting companies with tables at Unveiled to make it worth the effort to get to Las Vegas in time for the event.



This year's Unveiled had over 50 different companies showing their products. Just about every aspect of consumer electronics was represented, from design to retail sales. We found a couple of vendors that products we thought you'd like to hear about.

The first table we visited was staffed by Pamela McCracken of **Logitech**. She had several new products on display that really caught our eye. The **G19 Keyboard for Gaming** was especially impressive. The Logitech G19 keyboard features a tiltable, color GamePanel



LCD to show game stats, VOIP communication data, and many other favorite items. With customization capabilities such as user-selectable character backlighting color, 12 fully programmable G-keys, two high-speed USB ports and multi-key input, the Logitech G19 keyboard is the perfect weapon for your gaming rig.  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

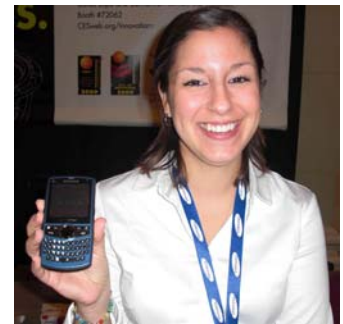
Caroline Pierce who handles public relations for **Oregon Scientific** had several of their products on display.

In this picture she's holding the **ATC5K Action Camera**. It's designed and engineered with extreme precision, outdoor enthusiasts can't wait to get this hands-free camera - and attach it to their helmet, arm, leg, bike and more! Both shock resistant and waterproof up to 10 feet, the ATC5K is ready to capture challenging feats down mountain bike trails, up the skateboard ramp or across the sky on a hang glider.



In addition to catching the latest tricks, the ATC5K can be plugged directly into a television or footage can be download in .avi format via USB. The ATC5K also captures still photos, functions as a Web cam, works seamlessly with most video editing software and is PC and Mac compatible.  
[www2.oregonscientific.com](http://www2.oregonscientific.com)

**Samsung Mobile** was represented by Tracy Calabrese and she had a wide selection of Samsung phones on display. The **Samsung Saga** (SCH-i770) is a CDMA/GSM phone and uses Windows Mobile 6.1 Professional. It has Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, a 2.0 megapixel camera and just about everything you'd expect in a state-of-the-art business phone.  
[www.samsung.com/us/semiconductor](http://www.samsung.com/us/semiconductor)



January 7th was Press Conference Day at the SCC. Many of the major players have agreed to cooperate with each other so they can get the most press coverage with the least conflict. From 8AM until 5PM there are press conferences scheduled in the conference rooms at the Sands/Venetian. Each press conference starts on the hour and ends at :45 so the press can move to the next room. It works surprising well with very few conflicts.

**LG** is the traditional first press conference and they led off again this year. Michael Ahn, President and

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## 2009 CES REPORT

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CEO of LG America, as well as a Vietnam War vet, described 2009 as a challenge for the company. The world economy will make this year a challenge for every company but LG is going to use their customer service as a way of staying ahead.

One new product that LG had on hand (literally) was a new Watch Phone. It's like Dick Tracey's phone but also includes an MP3 player. No price was mentioned and it should be available later in 2009. [us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)

At the **Casio** press conference Kazuo Kashio, Founder, President and CEO of Casio, briefed us on their new high speed camera technology. The **EX-F1** camera has a high speed burst mode that allows you to choose the exact picture you want at sports events. It is also effective for night shots without the blur you usually get in low light situations. In movie mode you can shoot at up to 120 frames per second, great for special effects like a water balloon bursting! Most of Casio's new cameras have high speed shooting capabilities .

By reducing the size of the circuitry and the image sensor units, Casio has produced two very small cameras that offer a high-speed 30 shot-per-second burst rate and high-speed movies at a maximum of 1000 fps. The **EX-FS10** is a card-sized camera just .64" thin, and the EX-FC100 is a compact in camera that fits perfectly the palm of the hand.

We also had a demo of Casio's new **Dynamic Photo** software. The new Dynamic Photo function allows the photographer to cut out the main subject of interest in an image that has just been captured and then combine it with another image to form the background. Users can also cut and paste several rapid-succession images to create a moving subject on a still background. The software looked very impressive and should appeal to the social networking set. It allows users to create personalized greeting cards that can be read online. [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)

The **Sony** press event, once again, was an exercise in futility. Every year Sony goes through a massive pre-registration, check-in, over-control ritual. After forcing the press to stand in lines that Sony's people keep shifting around (move here, now move here, now go back to where you started) they finally give

up and just let everyone in. I'm serious, they do the same thing every year! Isn't the definition of insanity doing the same thing over and over and expecting to get different results?

One of the most useful products we saw at CES was the **USB Flashlight-er**. The USB Flashlight-er is an in-dash, rechargeable flashlight that allows you to continue to charge any electronic application that uses a USB to mini USB adapter. You can leave it in your power port indefinitely, charging your phone, and when you need a flashlight, just remove it. It's only \$29.95 and everyone should have one in their car. [www.theflashlighter.com](http://www.theflashlighter.com)



On the night before the show opened we attended the **Pepcom Digital Experience** event. The Pepcom event is one of the two BIG evening events and allows us the press to meet with many vendors away from the crowds on the show floor.

The first table we stopped at was **Western Digital** where Heather Skinner had many of their new internal and external hard drives on display. One of the external drives was the Mac ready My Passport Studio. It's available in 320, 400 and 500GB model and uses both USB 2.0 and FireWire 800/400 interfaces. [www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)



Right next door to WDC was the **Pentax** table. Michelle Martin had several new cameras on display, including the Pentax Optio W60 waterproof digital camera and the Pentax K2000 digital SLR. We're looking forward to reviewing the K2000 in the near future.



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# 2009 CES REPORT

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Pentax announced two new compact digital cameras, the Optio E70 and P70 models. Both of them are small, light and will be available in multiple colors. [www.pentaximaging.com](http://www.pentaximaging.com)

At the **Nuance** table Erica Hill was showing some of our favorite software, **Dragon NaturallySpeaking 10** and **OmniPage 16**. Both products are tools that will make your life easier. We've reviewed them recently and both are highly recommended. [www.nuance.com](http://www.nuance.com)



Marieke Oer (left) of **Sennheiser** and Erika Pearson (right) of Nicoll PR were showing the fabulous **HD 800** headphones. We were very impressed by the HD 800 for two reasons, the sound quality and the surprisingly light weight! They are designed for the serious audiophile and use state-of-the-art Duofol diaphragms for superior sound reproduction. [www.sennheiserusa.com](http://www.sennheiserusa.com)



Jackie Ballinger, PR Director of **Griffin Technology**, had many of their accessories on display. Griffin makes an incredible assortment of products for iPods, iPhones and MP3 players of all kinds. They even make Zune products! If you're looking for power solutions, speakers, cases, FM transmitters, cables or anything else, they probably have exactly what you want. Go to their web site and take a look at just what they have available, you'll be amazed. [www.griffintechology.com](http://www.griffintechology.com)



Caleb Mason of **Delorme** was showing off the new **Earthmate GPS PN-40**. The PN-40 is the newest version of Delorme's handheld GPS products aimed at people who enjoy the great outdoors. It's small, light, has a great color screen and is amazingly fast. We're currently working on a review of the PN-40 so watch for it in an upcoming issue. [www.delorme.com](http://www.delorme.com)



**Kingston Technology** had several new products on display. David Leong was surrounded by press the entire evening so that meant I had an opportunity to chat with Claudia Martinez instead. That was definitely a plus for me!



Two of the products Kingston introduced were **SDHC Video Cards** designed for digital video cameras and the **ssdNOW E Series** of solid state drives. The Video SDHC cards come in 4, 8 and 16GB capacities and can record up to 360 minutes (16GB card at 16MB/s). [www.kingston.com](http://www.kingston.com)



One of the big surprise we received was seeing the name **Vivitar** again. Back in the 1970s and '80 Vivitar was a major name in camera lenses and a lesser name in cameras. They were never a manufacturer but they had contractors build excellent products for them. I still have two superb Vivitar Series 1 lenses for my Minolta SLRs that were as good as any lenses I've ever used.

**Sakar International** acquired the Vivitar brand last year and introduced new Vivitar products including digital, underwater and video cameras as well as digital SLR camera lenses and a battery charger that accommodates over 300 different camera and other lithium ion batteries. [www.sakar.com](http://www.sakar.com)



**Continued next month.**

## MINIREVIEWS

### QUICK LOOKS AT SOME INTERESTING PRODUCTS

#### Marvel Heroes Comic Book Creator

by: Andrew Meade

This is so much fun! Sometimes, you want something to happen in the comics or the movies and it doesn't. This is how you can make it happen just the way you want it to, using a bunch of Marvel comics characters. There are plenty of graphics, fonts, layouts, characters and bubbles to do just about anything. It's easy to use and manipulate. You can print your comic out, e-mail it to your friends, or even post it on your website. Just what I need for my MySpace page! So easy, there isn't even a manual, just a quick-start sheet.

\$29.99

[www.mycomicbookcreator.com](http://www.mycomicbookcreator.com)

#### Corel Paint Shop Pro X

by: Kate Meade

This program allows you to create quality professional looking pictures without all the expense. Very user-friendly, it comes with a lot of tools and the instruction manual is easy to read and explains the processes beautifully. There are certain features I don't like, such as the items you can insert into your picture, (i.e. elephants, tigers, bears, bows, etc.) I found those to be a waste. There is a lot here and it takes up a great deal of memory, but if you enjoy creating with photography, it's well worth it. The workspace layout is easy to get around and you can work with several pictures at once without getting in your own way.

I was able to create a piece for my father and brother using an old picture of my father and grandfather, as well as a current similar photo of my father and brother. I enhanced the older photo, reversed the current one and laid them out on a background with a specially chosen bible verse. The result was a beautiful photo, blending three generations and honoring their relationships. They loved it and so did I. It took some time, but this program made it fun to do and easy to work with.

\$79.99

[www.corel.com](http://www.corel.com)

#### Casio Exilim EX-V8 Camera

by: Kate Meade

Love this camera! All digital zoom, trouble-free menus and slide-open lens cover make this camera easy to carry and use. A face recognition feature makes focusing quick and there are multiple settings for lighting, shutter speed, picture size, etc. The Anti-shake feature didn't really impress me, and the picture program it comes with I don't like at all, but I don't need either of those anyway. The display is large and the buttons aren't too small to work. I don't like bulky cameras (with the exception of 35mm film cameras) and tiny cameras get lost too easy. This one is just the right size and takes beautiful pictures. Like I said, "Love it."

\$329.99

[www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)



#### Lexmark P350 Portable Photo Printer

by: Kate Meade

Fast, easy to use and prints fantastic pictures! Just perfect for a mother of two who can't take pictures fast enough of her adorable children and then never has time to print them out. With on-deck card slots, a USB port and bluetooth connection, you can print your pictures from just about any source. There is a 2.4" color display for viewing and editing your photos and (my favorite feature) a handle! Yep, you can pick it up and carry it with you. Great for parties. I guess. Actually, it is a pretty good idea since Polaroid cameras and film are a thing of the past. Almost as small as a Polaroid, too. Seriously, this compact printer is a great way to get quality, affordable pictures whenever you want them.

\$129.99

[www.lexmark.com](http://www.lexmark.com)

# AMBICom GPS-USB

## NEVER GET LOST ON THIS PLANET

by Jan Fagerholm, Wandering Reporter

**The Bullet Points:** The **AmbiCom GPS-USB** is an inexpensive Global Positioning System (GPS) for Windows based PCs that uses the USB interface. It features 20 channel satellite navigation, SBAS/WAAS implementations, SiRF Star III, and supports NMEA-0183 protocol. (See explanation of alphabet soup elsewhere.) Its accuracy is within 5-10 meters of resolution, updating 10 times per second. Maximum altitude 59055 ft., maximum velocity 1690 ft./sec. (1,152 mph) It is 2.16" x 1.45" x 0.65", weighs 2 oz. And has a 6.5 ft. USB cable. It works with Microsoft Streets and Trips 2006 and up, DeLorme Street Atlas 2006 and up, and most NMEA-0183 compliant software. Works on Windows 98SE, 2000, XP and Vista.

**What's in the Box:** GPS-USB unit, CD-ROM with drivers, Quick Installation guide.

**The Review:** Curious about Global Positioning Systems (GPSs), but think they're too expensive for a toy? The AmbiCom GPS-USB could be the answer to a question you don't even have, and along the way, you may actually find it useful. At its nominal price of \$45, it's cheaper than an evening out, and the fun last a lot longer.

The GPS-USB is made by AmbiCom, who makes a wide variety of wireless and GPS devices adapted to everything from PCs to Palms and SmartPhones. The GPS-USB is dedicated to the PC architecture (logically a laptop) and is specifically made for Windows-based laptops.

I've had practical experience with GPSs for 20 years in aircraft, but I continue to be amazed at what silicon engineering has done to the interface and the price.

The first civil aircraft units with moving map displays used to cost about \$50,000, and had much less resolution than this \$45 PC accessory.

GPS is a venerable technology: NAVSTAR-GPS was developed by DOD-ARPA in the late 1960s. It didn't become available for civil use until the Korean Airline Flight 007 incident in 1983, at which time President Reagan issued a directive making the technology available free for civilian use in the interest of the common good. Early civil units had built-in offsets that limited their accuracy for military security reasons until after the fall of the Soviet Union. Present civilian units operate at the maximum resolution that the technology will

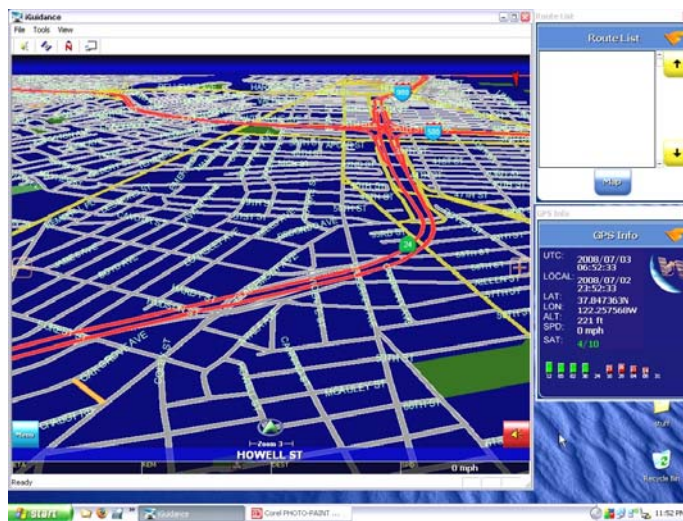
allow. It's an indication of how far that the engineering has come to see how capable and inexpensive present units are.

Briefly, GPS works with 24 or so medium earth orbit satellites (non-geosynchronous) to trilaterate with each one it can receive, then combine this and do the math to convert this to latitude, longitude and elevation. When your receiver moves, it can track the movement and calculate your speed. In the case of this PC unit, the mapping application takes this raw information and converts it to some sort of display, depending on your mapping application.

Unlike hand-help units, the GPS-USB has no screen or buttons; it is software driven from your laptop, so you also need a mapping program that can communicate with the GPS. I used it with Microsoft Streets and Trips 2007 and Netropa iGuidance 4.0.

Let me be blunt - GPS on a laptop is not practical unless you are willing to spend a lot of time getting it going before using it. This is not a turn-on-ready-to-go setup. Starting from the ground up, you must

*(Continued on page 13)*



iGuidance screen, 3D view



## AMBI COM GPS-USB

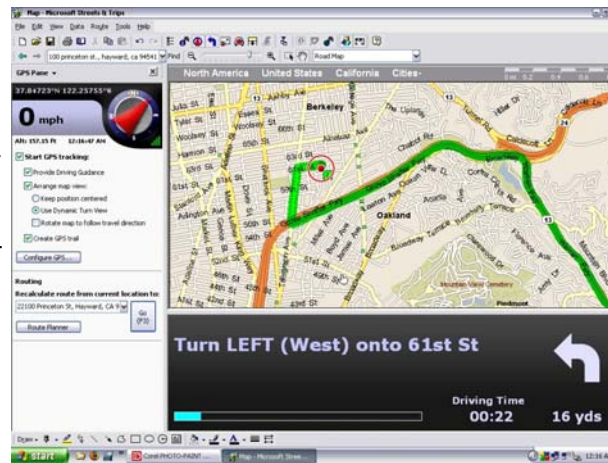
(Continued from page 12)

start the computer, wait for a desktop, plug in the GPS, start the mapping software, wait for the application and wait for the GPS to wake up and synchronize to satellites. Cold-start wake up times for the GPS itself are up to a full minute before satellite signals are received and stabilized. So, don't get in the car, then turn everything on and expect to go as soon as you start the engine. You also don't want to start driving away before everything is ready because you are going to have to enter a destination address and respond to several Windows dialogs before GPS tracking starts working. If you think driving and dialing a mobile phone is dangerous, just imagine driving while typing and double-clicking. Your insurance company doesn't cover this.

I'm not saying it's useless, though. You simply must have enough time to set everything up before you get in the car and turn the key. If you ever take the time to go to the Internet and print a map before getting in the car, you can spend the same amount of time starting the laptop, the mapping program and GPS, then get in the car with it working. If you go unfamiliar places a lot (I do), then you will find using the GPS and laptop less treacherous than trying to read a paper map while driving.

Mapping programs that use GPS generally give oral instructions while you are driving. This allows you to keep your eyes on the road. MS Streets & Trips give generic turn instructions in proximity without naming the exit or street. The iGuidance program is smart enough to actually call out the street name when you are approaching it, like a car-based GPS does. This is helpful when you are approaching an exit that leads to multiple streets.

The AmbiCom GPS-USB has a magnetic base for sticking it on the roof of a car or other vehicle, which should give better reception. Practically speaking, I found the receiver just as effective when placed on the dashboard under the windshield, which also avoids the nuisance of rolling down a window and placing it on the roof of the car.



In use, the AmbiCom GPS-USB is very responsive and its accuracy is very impressive. If I drive into my driveway at home, the receiver knows I have strayed off the street and tells me that I am "off route". The map zooms in and shows my path while I am walking to the front of the house and up the porch to the front door, then shows my path while walking into the house. Elsewhere, the receiver is accurate enough to see when I am driving on roads that have been changed during construction. In the case of MS Streets and Trips, the street data is more than a year old, and does not know, for example, that when I am driving over the new Benicia-Martinez bridge that I am indeed on a road: the program complains that I am "off route" and shows me merrily driving on water.

OK, so is this inexpensive GPS practical? Yes, if you are given to patience and planning. Frankly, a dedicated hand-held unit is more practical, simply because it's easier to set up and use from the power button forward. If you need to use this technology a lot, you are much better off with a dedicated hand-held GPS. What the AmbiCom GPS-USB and its rivals offer is the ability to try out full-fledged GPS capabilities for less than the price of your average computer game. Some mapping programs, notably Microsoft offers Streets & Trips 2008 bundled with a USB GPS. It's a practical way to find out if you need or want this technology. If you already have the mapping software, the cost of adding the GPS is trivial. Google Earth Pro (the pay version) will interface with GPSs, and this strikes me as one of the most appealing combinations possible because of Google Earth's satellite imagery. Unfortunately, I can't report on this as I don't have the Pro version.

GPSs are the technical toy of the season. If you're planning a driving trip this summer, get one and take it along: it's cheaper than a tankful of gas, and might even save you some in lost driving. It will prove both entertaining and useful. Highly recommended.

Web price ~\$45  
[www.ambicom.com](http://www.ambicom.com)

## THE DEALS GUY

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click,  
Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

### **\*They Said It Couldn't Be Done**

Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes when a company sheds one of its holdings? When the separation between Daimler's and Chrysler's financial systems needed to happen, many said that would not be achieved for years, but one guy decided the experts were wrong and accomplished wonders. Read this fascinating story at: <<http://www.informationweek.com/news/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=211200970>>.

Here's an article about what some schools are doing to gather data that would help improve the students chances for getting the most out of school. It's lengthy, but is at: <[http://www.informationweek.com/news/business\\_intelligence/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=211600206&pgno=1&queryText=&isPrev=>](http://www.informationweek.com/news/business_intelligence/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=211600206&pgno=1&queryText=&isPrev=>)>. Some 'letters to the editor' printed later were also interesting from folks that said that teachers also should share the responsibility for a good education for students.

Just a reminder about the special offer for Diskeeper that is still good. <<http://www.diskeeper.com/purchase/purchase.aspx>> Also, I have not tried any of the products below except TeamViewer.

### **\*Reminder**

I have been using TaxAct to do my income tax for a few years now and I'm happy with it, although I do use the pay version because it brings data forward from last year to edit and the free version doesn't; you must type in all the data again. The free version also does one free E-file for you, and if there's a refund, you'll get it back in ten days. Visit <<http://www.taxact.com>>.

### **\*DVD Converter At No Cost**

DVDVideoSoft Ltd. has updated their Free Video to Flash Converter:

With Free Video to Flash Converter it is very easy to enrich a corporate web site or a personal blog with a good looking video. The program offers over 80 different themes for the flash player. Free Video to Flash Converter converts video files, one by one, or several files at once, to flash (SWF and FLV). Do the whole movie or just a portion in order to make a required video.

The updated Free Video to Flash Converter has a completely new player that meets all up-to-date standards and has all necessary features. Among them are:

- full screen mode;
- volume control;
- autoloop enable/disable feature;
- autoplay enable/disable feature;
- loop playback;
- big play button on the video;
- play list;
- subtitles support;
- hot keys support.

Free Video to Flash Converter's design is somewhat strict, but the colors of all player elements are customizable. Now everyone can find the matching one for the particular site. The application runs under both XP and Vista; very convenient for the majority of users.

Free Video to Flash Converter is available at <<http://www.dvdvideosoft.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm>> for immediate free download. The program contains no spyware or adware and no activation or registration is required.

### **\*Now For A New Task Manager**

AnVir Software has released AnVir Task Manager Pro 5.4, a complete application that lets you control everything that's going on while using your computer. AnVir Task Manager manages startup programs and active processes and removes spyware while offering a great variety of Windows enhancements. No need to install dozens of system utilities. You need only one program instead; AnVir Task Manager.

This Task Manager replacement analyzes everything that's currently active on your system and displays it on a tabbed interface. It displays programs that are scheduled to run upon Windows start, as well as all active processes, and services. It shows full information about each process including command line, its DLLs in use, inbound and outbound traffic, disk load, tray icon, performance graph, and Internet connections.

AnVir Task Manager monitors the system's workload, dropping icons in the system tray that indicate

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## THE DEALS GUY

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CPU usage (including a breakdown by application), hard drive temperature, free space, disk activity (again with per-application info), laptop battery, memory, and network inbound and outbound traffic. You always know exactly what's loading your PC's processing power.

AnVir Task Manager automatically provides a security risk rating for each active process, service and startup program. The security risk rating indicates the likelihood of a program being potential spyware, malware or a Trojan. The rating is based on behavior, code analysis, and integrated database with information about 70,000+ startup programs, Internet Explorer toolbars and services. When any program tries to add itself to startup, AnVir Task Manager shows a notification and enables you to cancel each new startup program you consider useless or harmful. Right click on any suspicious process or file and check it on [virustotal.com](http://www.virustotal.com) with 30 antivirus products.

AnVir Task Manager makes using XP or Vista much handier. With it you can minimize selected application windows to the system tray to save taskbar space. You can make windows semi-transparent, or pin them "always on top" by just right-clicking on the title of any running application. Also, you get the list of recently used folders in Open/Save dialogs. On Windows XP it shows the drive's free space with a colored horizontal bar in Windows "My Computer." AnVir Task Manager offers a very useful Tweaker that gives you direct access to many Windows settings, enabling you to make your operating system behave the way you want. Tweaker also includes many settings that cannot be accessed in Windows at all without directly editing the registry. AnVir Task Manager dramatically accelerates your PC or Windows boot process. The Startup tab shows all programs that run on Windows start. It includes name, file path, company, and description. You can disable or delete programs that you don't need and your PC will run much faster.

With its "Delayed Startup" feature, you can set up any startup program to load one or more minutes later after Windows startup. This allows you to begin using the computer without waiting for Windows to load all startup applications. Also, you can run startup programs as minimized to system tray, or as floating icons.

AnVir Task Manager runs on Windows XP/Vista/2003/2008 and is available in Pro version for

\$59.95, standard version for \$39.95 and a free version, which still has a lot of functions. Users Group members get 15% discount from the retail price using the coupon code "user group." You won't see that on their Web site. 20-days evaluation trial is available free from [www.anvir.com](http://www.anvir.com).

### **\*Take Control Remotely**

Having someone talk you through fixing a problem on your computer doesn't always accomplish the task very well, besides taking a lot of time. Perhaps a better solution would be for the other person to take control of your machine and physically do the job before your very eyes, which sometimes happens when you call a company's tech support. This could also be a better system for a helper to teach you how to use your software to accomplish a special task. <http://www.Teamviewer.com> might be the answer for this, and the product is free.

Hewie Poplock <http://www.hewie.net> of Central Florida Computer Society told me he tried this and it works well. Both parties need the product on their computer, but only one actually needs it installed for a session. The other can simply run it without actually installing it. Check their Web site for more information. In fact, he set up a session with my machine, although on the first try, I accidentally had control of his machine, so we had to start over, but the connection was easy. According to their Web site, we could have exchanged control, but we didn't realize that. He checked some settings on my machine and then I asked him to actually transfer a file from my floppy drive to his machine. While I could watch him moving the cursor around to check my settings, I was surprised that I couldn't see it when he did the file transfer and he didn't know a way to make it show up for me, but he also transferred a jpeg of a document to my machine. If your file is too large for an e-mail, this method would do the file transfer quickly and easily.

Hewie also suggested another remote control product, but has not fully tried it out. It's called CrossLoop and Don Singleton has an article about it in his APCUG Reports, just released. Visit <http://reports.apcug.org/2009q1.htm> to get that publication.

That's it for this month. I'll have some more new product announcements on my Web site that didn't offer discounts. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [bobclick at bellsouth dot net](mailto:bobclick@bellsouth.net). Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>

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I call that bold talk from a four-eyed fat man.

LS/MFT

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