

In this issue...

Dell Loss Leaders
Yahoo Virus, Rootkits, and Sony DRM
Plasma, LCD, and DLP
New Phones
Calendars
Price Watch and Iteon News

Dell Loss Leaders

Right now is a great time to buy a desktop computer from Dell. They have very fast computers (2.8 GHz Dual Core with 1GB RAM and 80GB HD) at good prices. The sales come and go--if you can watch for a couple of weeks, you can easily save \$200-\$300.

Yahoo Virus, Rootkits, and Sony DRM

There are a few new threats out in the wild.

Yahoo Virus. First, there is a worm/virus that affects Yahoo mail accounts when viewed from a browser. It only requires *reading the email* for the virus to be introduced to your computer. Avoid opening messages from av3@yahoo.com or with the subject line "New Graphic Site." It is likely that there will be copycats in the coming week or two, and it is possible that even more effective attacks could be created (also potentially for other mail services) as this virus attacks a Java vulnerability.

Rootkits. A rootkit is a small program that can be placed on a computer to allow a person to take it over completely from a remote location. It isn't a virus so the A/V software often won't detect it. Hackers use rootkits to attack other computers so that if they are detected, the attack cannot be traced back to them. Aside from a virus that destroys data, a rootkit is the worst kind of malware in the wild today because it means your computer is completely "owned."

Sony DRM. DRM = Digital Rights Management (usually anti-piracy code, such as found in music files downloaded from iTunes that only allow them to be played on so many devices). About 6 months ago, Sony decided that too many CDs are being pirated. They put DRM software on their CDs that prevented people from playing them on PCs except when using the Sony player (which was also on the CD). The problem was that the DRM software was also a rootkit. It communicated personal information to Sony, and also can be exploited by any hacker. Worse, it is *cloaked*. Uninstalling it (even using Sony's *apology* software) causes the computer's CD player to stop working. Because of this, there are tens of thousands of computers that can be easily "owned" by any hacker that exploits the rootkit. Most users have no idea that the rootkit is there.

Plasma, LCD, DLP

Price. Let's say you have \$2,500 to spend. You should be able to find a good, brand-name 42" plasma for this price--less if you watch prices carefully. For an LCD flat-panel that is capable of viewing 1024x768 (standard computer resolution), you're probably looking at 27" (brand-name) or 32" (off-brand). (The main reason people buy LCDs is so that they can use them for presentations or with computers--computers don't display very well on plasmas.) By the same token, a \$2,500 DLP purchase will almost get you an off-brand 61" screen, and the best ones aren't a lot more. Prices just have recently fallen on all three types.



Thickness. The LCD and the Plasma are going to be the same thickness (a few inches thick), and can be mounted on a wall. The DLP is going to be thicker, and generally are not mounted to walls. DLPs are a lot less deep than a regular TV would be, probably closer to 12"-18". When you are buying any of these, you really need to figure in the cost of the stand or mount--it can add \$200-\$500, or more.

Quality. The LCD is often going to have the best clarity and sharpness, but black can be a bit washed out to someone who is really looking for the ultimate picture. The plasma will generally give you the best screen for action. The best DLPs can be every bit as good as flat panel LCD. There was a time where different technologies had difficulty with viewing images from the side, the "rainbow" effect, and brightness, but these issues have mostly been solved--just be careful if one model is way cheaper than others in its class.

Here are the things you'll want to consider when buying:

- Inches and type (DLP costs most, LCD flat panels most)
- Cost and Brand (if you've never heard of it, be very sure about quality, brightness, picture, sound, etc.)
- Mount or stand required
- If needed for a computer, resolution is key--must be true 1024x768 or it is worthless; higher costs more
- Brightness (the best ones shoot a lot of light without looking washed out) measured by contrast ratio (1500:1 won't work in bright rooms, higher is better)
- Sound system (will you need a surround sound system?)
- Connections (HDMI/DVI are key for high end systems)
- HD vs. HD Ready ("HD ready" should be \$150 less--means you need to lease HD card from your cable co.)

For more geeky info, check this out:

www.audioholics.com/techtips/specsformats/displays_LCD_DLP_plasma1.html

New Phones

Three new phones are worth a look: Treo700p, Treo700w, and MotoQ (AudioVox 6700 was reviewed last issue).

Treo700w

The 700w is a nightmare. Nothing seems to work right, there are crashing issues, and it is still only available on Verizon. Run, don't walk, away from this one.

Treo700p

The 700p is a very nice phone. It isn't any lighter or more durable than the 650, but early indications are that the battery will last a little longer. It has EVDO (10x faster data), but is only available on Sprint and Verizon (Cingular's faster speed network is not ready yet). Also, the screen seems to have slightly better resolution, and a lot of the bugs with the 650 have been fixed. This is a nice phone, but it is still priced at \$600-\$700 (vs. \$250-\$350 for a 650). Price will probably drop slowly over the next 3-5 months.



Motorola MotoQ

The MotoQ has a smaller screen and it trades touch screen for the Rokr instead of having both (which is a real bummer). It is a neat device (better than the AudioVox 6700), but it runs on Windows Mobile. There is a lot of software for Windows that could help you hobble together an *almost Treo*, if you really want the MotoQ or AudioVox 6700. Also battery life is even worse than on a Treo650. One thing, though--it is priced a lot less than the 650 (deals well under \$200). Windows will likely begin to take marketshare over the coming 2 years as the devices coming out for Windows Mobile are quite good, but for now, stick with your Palm.



In 20 words or less: Hold onto the 650, unless it is dying--try to wait for price drops on the Treo700p.

Calendar Tools

I think that everyone who gets this newsletter has Exchange at the office. It works. You can share calendars, schedule meetings, and multiple people can see the same calendars. Not so at home. It can be incredibly frustrating when you want to see if you can schedule a 5:30 meeting but don't know what is going on at home. There are a few calendar products that you can buy, but none can really compete with the free calendars offered by Google and Yahoo.

Both calendars give you the ability to receive SMS alerts. Google's is easier to set up, Yahoo's gives you more options. Both calendars allow you to make calendars available ([www.http://calendar.yahoo.com/polarbears swims](http://calendar.yahoo.com/polarbears swims) or using the "button" that can be dragged and dropped from Google), or just available to selected Google or Yahoo accounts, respectively. Both have different ways of doing group calendaring, and can pick up standard calendar stuff like a variety of holidays.


With Google, if you enter info about the location of an event, it can immediately map it. Also, Google is adding a lot of very cool features relative to linking. Pretty soon, web sites, emails, and other Internet *things* will likely have the ability to drag and drop dates to calendar and the information and location will follow, kind of like people are starting to embed GoogleMaps links into their sites.

Yahoo is both a little less intuitive, but also has many more features. You can customize your calendar by putting pictures, colors and lots of other goodies. Also, Yahoo has links to a lot of content like sports, weather, and finance. Yahoo will also link to tasks and a notepad--which are features much more like Outlook. Of course, if searchability is a key criterion for your calendar, Google is probably the calendar for you.

Neither site will sync with Exchange or Outlook. Neither is available offline. Also while both print out, neither really is good for sticking up on a fridge to write stuff on.

Even with the negatives, these are both pretty good options for family calendars. They are free, easy to use, have alerts to devices, and have features to make calendaring easy.

Price Watch

As predicted in the last newsletter, Intel 3.4 GHz dual core chips have fallen significantly in price. Dell is selling PCs very cheap, as is Apple now that they are using dual core chips in both laptops and desktops.  Prices are coming down quickly for Dell Laptops as well. Even better, Apple Intel dual core notebooks are a great deal right now and can be used as dual boot machines. Do remember, though, that every computer that is dual boot will need software licenses for both operating systems.

Now is a great time to be buying hardware, except Dell Servers. Prices on components are low, and there is heavy price competition in most areas. Wait on Treo700p.

Iteon News

Our regular clients probably haven't noticed, but we have a brand new website. The old disco-modern design just had to go. Hopefully the new web site matches us a little better--clean, crisp, things are easy to find, and hopefully the website says one thing loud and clear--we provide a level of service that no one can match.

While most of our clients probably wouldn't have noticed our web site, probably quite a few people have noticed Jay Goldberg--our newest team member. Jay is a senior consultant with 12 years of engineering experience. Jay also holds a law degree, has quite interesting law enforcement experience, and is also a pilot. We're sure that many of you will see Jay around, and enjoy his humor.

As always, thank you for your business and referrals!