Newsletter: Using Computers in Chemical Education Fall 2003

ACS Division of Chemical Education :--Committee on Computers in Chemical Education

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Wireless Laptop

In using my powerful laptop, reviewed here last year, I'm wondering if I need my desktop computers. I usually use desktop computers at work and home for most of my projects, and my laptop for presentation use in lectures. Utilizing three or more different machines makes for a lot of work keeping bookmarks, new programs, etc., up-to-date. Additionally keeping and having all the different projects I work on available wherever and whenever I have some spare time is difficult as is keeping it all backed up.

My present G4 portable is able to run any of the programs I use. With the exception of large movie files, its 60 GB hard drive is quite a bit of information storage for ordinary use. If I want to work on my PowerPoint lectures at home, there they are right on the laptop exactly the same as I used them earlier in lecture. If I need to pick out a picture from my photo collection for PowerPoint lectures or to attach to an email to a colleague, they are right on my machine. Handy.

When it comes to updating the operating system, or all the other software I do it once. Virtually all I need is on the G4 laptop and it is really convenient, as well as a time saver.

Add wireless Internet ability, Airport in my case, and I can select Internet links for my students, check to see that they are still what I expect then down to my multimedia room and the connection to the Internet with our T1 line is still hot. This saves a bit of time in each lecture.

We now have wireless available throughout our academic buildings so I'm no longer dependent on an Airport base station. On occasion I have some questions for one of our technicians that she can't help with over the phone so I walk my laptop to her three buildings away and never lose the connection. My question is easy to answer when she can see and play with the actual situation. Generally it takes hours or days to get assistance in my office.

At home an Airport base station functions in the same way. I start the G4 laptop, and it brings up all three browsers I use, connects with my ISP, checks and downloads my mail (so far it will only check my mail at the location I'm attached to), and open the applications I've been using.

Additions:

I've got a 15.2 inch screen, which is supposed to be equivalent to a 17 inch CRT, and it just doesn't seem big enough when I'm working on a project with many windows open. The solution was to get another display. My 22 inch flat display from Apple is great. I use both displays together so it similar to having one really big screen, the cursor moves effortlessly from one monitor to the other. Really nice to work with, and the 22 inch flat display is brighter and sharper than my 21 inch CRT.

Also I miss a mouse with a wheel, the keypad is ok for a few things but not for procedures that take many steps. It is easy to add a USB mouse with a wheel and additional buttons. My typing has fewer errors using a professional keyboard and it is again easy to add. If everything is on one machine timely backups are critical and with external FireWire drives it is straightforward. The utilities Carbon Copy Cloner (free Mac only), or Retrospect Express, (Mac and Windows) are useful for backing up to an external FireWire drive, DVD, or CD.

The PreferencePanes now available are very useful. For instance on a Mac, Key Xing comes with a lot of handy Scripts that you can assign to the hot keys of your choice. I assigned option G to make a Google search link. When I select a word or phrase such as Key Xing, then press option G, a small floating window opens. I paste the selection (or just drag and drop it) press return and get the Google search results in a new window in the main browser (it opens the browser if it's not open).

You may open a lot of windows in the course of working on projects, though it is easy to close all of them (hold option while clicking on the close button on any window), but you probably want some window open to look at files. I wrote an AppleScript to do this. Now when I want to clean up I click my chosen keys and the AppleScript below is run closing all open windows and then opening two of the size at the correct location and pointing at the files I usually want.

```
tell application "Finder"

	--closes all windows then opens two windows for general use

	--close window "Brian"

	close every window

	--get the index of startup disk

	open home

	--set the current view of the front window to column and resize window

	set the current view of front window to column view
```

```applescript
        set the bounds of front window to {1, 44, 1212, 481}

        --X1, Y1, X2. Y2      upper left and lower right corners

        --open second window

        open folder "documents" of home

        set the current view of front window to column view

        set the bounds of front window to {1, 500, 1212, 820}

        --X1, Y1, X2. Y2      upper left and lower right corners

        --open second window

        select window of home
end tell
```

Assign this or any other AppleScript to the keys of your choice and the Script runs through Key Xing.

This is only one of many useful scripts that automate often-repeated tasks. Many other PreferencePanes are available to make using your system easier to use and more productive.

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