

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 189: What's On the Horizon

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From time to time, I am amazed by one or another news story relating to science or computing. Here are a few.

A small company called Crossbar has developed a small, postage stamp-sized resistive RAM chip that holds 1 terabyte of data (that is, 1,000,000,000,000 bytes, also equal to 1,000 gigabytes). Since a byte is 8 bits, the chip will hold 8 terabits of data, or 8,000,000,000,000 "on or off" switches, and they stay toggled one way or the other even when the power is off. How would you like to have a terabyte of data in your smart phone? (That is around 50 times what current phones hold.) You could download and save thousands of movies and audio files, rather than having to stream them online.

One news flash I recently heard on National Public Radio concerns the flu virus inoculation you will be receiving or have already received this year. It was sent via the Internet! The story is that, when the current variant of the flu surfaced for the first time in China this year, Chinese scientists sequenced the DNA composition (blueprints) of the virus and sent those blueprints via email on the Internet to the U.S. Our scientists used the blueprints in that message to create an exact copy of the virus here, which they then used to prepare the millions of antivirus shots used to inoculate folks in our country. No need to send the actual virus by courier, as was always done in the past. Just the blueprints were sent so the virus could be reconstructed here, saving the courier time from China to the U.S. That made the antivirus available at least a couple of days early. As one of the recipients of this year's antivirus inoculation, it is fun to think that my shot was designed from data sent over the Internet!

Circuit Scribe is a brand new company that is developing ballpoint pens that allow you to draw circuits on ordinary paper. The conductivity of the drawn line is 50-100 milliohms per square per mil. The water-based conductive ink line will conduct current at about 175 ma on standard paper, higher on smooth paper such as the paper photos are printed on. That means you can draw circuits that actually are circuits! This seems to be a fantastic tool for simple circuit testing or unique applications. Watch for this one – they will be shipping stuff around late spring or early summer 2014. How about putting the ink in your inkjet printer? How about a simple crystal radio drawn on a sheet of paper? All kinds of stuff come to mind.

According to <http://majorgeeks.com>, Amazon.com is working on plans to deliver your orders via unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) that look much like toy helicopters. If approved by the FAA, deliveries could begin in 2015. Watch your doorstep for a mini-helicopter delivery!

Would you like to see a computer topic covered in the Computer Corner? I am always open to suggestions. Send it to me via email at the address above.

Happy Computing!

"The abdomen, the chest, and the brain will forever be shut from the intrusion of the wise and humane surgeon."
Sir John Eric Ericksen, British surgeon, appointed Surgeon-Extraordinary to Queen Victoria, 1873.