

No-Fear Computing!



us — not you, me or anyone else — can really grasp the magnitude to which the computer is going to directly or indirectly change the way we work and live our lives over the next few years. We're not talking the Jetsons or Star Trek (as in futuristic) — we're talking about the next two? three? or maybe five years down the road. (Possibly before your favorite jeans wear out.)

• It's also safe to say there is no industry — or ever has been one throughout history — that is evolving as rapidly as the computer

world is today. We're not talking about years (or even months) here. Dramatic changes and improvements in software and hardware are announced virtually every week, if not every day — which will trickle down to our industry.

• Although golf course management is a primarily "outdoor sport," this will change somewhat over time. One of the driving forces will be the integration of very sophisticated technology, including GPS (global positioning systems).

Read that as satellite) and GIS (geographic information systems) technology into irrigation, pest and disease tracking/prediction models, pesticide application and labor management systems.

GPS-based irrigation control software packages and GPS-based pesticide application technology were unveiled at the Las Vegas GCSAA show earlier this year.

Both GPS and GIS technology will allow (and mandate) management of more and more of the golf course from within, either by yourself or one of your staff. As technology evolves, golf course superintendents will spend less time *doing*, and more time *managing* their resources, including information.

• Perhaps the most important reason to take the plunge is evidenced by the growing number of superintendent and assistant job announcements today that specify "advanced computer literacy required." Enough said.

So what is this No Fear! business about?

Having been asked to speak at several of the upcoming conferences and seminars, on subjects ranging from computing in general, to the Internet, to TurfNet Online specifically, I have been forced to try to distill my own personal learning curve over the past few years into its basic elements.

What has allowed me to start from scratch and learn how to use one of these things at (ahem) the gateway to middle age? It boils down to (borrowing a phrase from the athletic apparel company): No Fear!

If you are envisioning mountain climbing, parachuting or hang gliding, that's not the image I meant to portray. Better, picture a four-year-old, perched on a stool, gazing at a computer screen, deftly wielding the mouse, navigating a simple game. That is the essence of no-fear computing!

Kids have no preconceptions or misgivings. It's a toy, with one big button on it. Turn it on, turn it off. Doesn't bite. Doesn't scratch. Doesn't sting. The computer doesn't hurt them, and they, by-and-large, can't hurt it!

BY PETER L. MCCORMICK

TurfNet Associates, Inc.

This is the time of year when the season winds down for many of you around the country. You're on the downswing, over the hump. During this calm before the approaching storm of winter conferences and trade shows, I thought I would take a step away from our traditional format and focus on the mechanics and mentality of using (and learning to use) computers in golf course management today.

Now, before you say, "I couldn't give two flying foxes about computers" and turn the page, read on.

Why computers? Let's start with several assumptions:

- It would be safe to say that no one of

Doing it

Make the decision to do it.

It's a natural first step for anything. Now is as good a time as any. Don't wait for New Year's Day to make the resolution though, because then comes the National, then vacation, then you're back into it before you know it. Take advantage of the off-season (if you have one) for some personal development. Do it now.

Do a little homework.

Pick up a copy of one of the Computers for Dummies series of softbound books, which are good primers for getting started. If you try the library, check the copyright date. Older than last year? Forget it. Find another book. Many magazines will swamp you with jargon.

Buy a decent computer capable of running today's software, preferably for home. Surprise the kids for the holidays. Or, better yet, treat yourself. Don't try to start with someone's castoff from a garage sale. You'll only add to your frustration.

The price is right.

You can buy a Pentium 166 or 200 today with all the bells and whistles (CD-ROM drive, faxmodem, sound card, monitor and all) for less than \$1500. Add a color inkjet printer (or a low-end laser) and tax and you're at \$2000. Half of what that system would have cost 18 months ago. It's plenty to get started, and will more than likely serve you well for several years.

Why buy for home?

The workplace is no place to learn to use a computer — way too many distractions. Set yourself up with a desk in a quiet corner of the house, with a good desk chair, decent lighting and a phone jack nearby. Once things quiet down, power up!

Play a game.

Before you dive into the heavy stuff, fire up the Windows Solitaire game. Beyond entertainment, Solitaire is there for a reason: it's a great way to learn to use the mouse. What's the big deal? The first time you move a mouse with your right hand and try to coordinate it with the little arrow moving around on the monitor, you may wonder if your fingers are actually connected to your brain.

Start simple.

Most new computers today come

loaded with an assortment of software. Many offer one of the "suites" of applications, like Microsoft Office or Lotus Smart Suite, which have advanced word processors, personal information managers (electronic Rolodexes and datebooks), spreadsheets, and database programs.

The advantage of the suites is they have a common "look" and "feel" throughout the variety of applications. The downside for the novice is these advanced programs can be overwhelmingly complex. I doubt even serious users barely scratch the full

potential of Microsoft Word. Not the place to start!

Some computers also have a simpler group of programs, like ClarisWorks, which are generally easier to learn how to use. My best suggestion: start with a very simple word processor, like Windows Wordpad. Compose a short letter, practice changing your margins, highlighting text, changing fonts and text sizes, bolding, italicizing. Then, save your work, and print it.

Learning is cumulative.

One of the fascinating aspects of learn-



HI-TECH

LET HI-TECH IRON-OUT YOUR TURF PROBLEMS!

MICRO-TECH • TECH-PLEX
(0-4-4) (0-5-8)

IRONMAN
8% FE, 8% Sul.

Non-burning, Non-staining,
Fully Chelated, Totally
Compatible, P.H. Buffer.

**The Most Highly
Concentrated Iron Products
Available!**

Long Lasting Green at a low
rate of 1-2 oz.
per 1,000 sq. ft.

TECH X-3

A Natural blend of 100%
Chelated Micro-Nutrients,
Bio-Stimulants, and a
Non-Burning Organic
Wetting Agent

- Tech X-3 •
- Micro-Tech •
- Ironman •
- Tech Plex •
- Dimension Granular •
- Cool Down •
- Bio-Blend •
- Nitro-Plus • Trace •
- Tech Pak Biostimulant •
- Roots • Tech Iron •
- Citra-Kleen • Bio-Tech •
- Roots •

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

HI-TECH

TURF PRODUCTS, INC.

Fort Myers, Florida 33919 • (941) 275-1820 • (800) 299-0911

ing to use a computer (and believe me, the learning never stops!) is that it builds on itself.

I recall the first evening with my first computer four years ago, trying to fumble through WordPerfect. It took me two hours to figure out how to center the text on the page. But I discovered how to do ten other things during the process. And so it goes.

Read the manual.

Do real men ever read a manual? Only if you want to shorten the "exploration" process in the previous paragraph from two hours to about 10 minutes.

Don't attempt to read it like a novel. Your chin will hit your chest in about three minutes. Use it to solve specific challenges.

Better yet, use online help.

One of the downsides of loaded or downloaded software is you often don't get a printed manual at all! Many software manufacturers are building their manuals into the help sections in the program itself.

And that's really better, because it's searchable by topic, and usually much faster to find an answer than thumbing through a manual.

Ask questions.

Leverage anyone you know who knows more than you do. Your assistant, wife, assistant's wife (easy now), crew, neighbors — yes, even your kids. Several months ago, when I first tackled HTML to do our website, I found my Internet service provider to be of great help, dramatically shortening my learning curve. Swallow your pride. Ask!

Take a class?

I really shouldn't comment on this one, because I've never done it. I have heard numerous guys tell me, "Yeah, I'm going to take a computer class one of these days" — but there it ends. You're better off just diving in, rather than procrastinating further by waiting for the time, place and motivation to come together all at once in order to do the class thing.

Safety nets:

Save your work early and often.

I learned the hard way. Too many

times. Start a new project, spend an hour working on it, then go to print it. Before you can hit the PRINT icon, the power goes off.

Poof!

Kiss your hour's work goodbye. The remedy: When you create a new document or file, name it, save it, and save it again periodically. If the program has a "prompt to save every "so many minutes" feature, use it.

Create a "data" directory or folder, and save all your files there. Then, back it up.

It's much easier and simpler to back up (create duplicate copies of) your files if they are all located in one central place, rather than scattered all over your hard drive among your program files. Get a tape drive, or one of the newer ZIP or JAZ drives, to make a backup copy of your important files, in case of a problem.

SITHOAWA

This is perhaps the most valuable

tip of all. A wonderful acronym. When you're stymied, stuck, frustrated, aggravated, or ready to put your fist through the monitor, invoke the SITHOAWA rule:

Shut It The Hell Off And Walk Away!

Learning to use a computer is much like learning to play the piano. At first intimidating, at times frustrating, yet ultimately rewarding and enjoyable. Progress at both is maximized by frequent practice of short duration. But you can't learn either until you sit down at the keys.

Computer geeks and accomplished pianists are no smarter than you or I. They just started a little earlier and perhaps applied themselves a bit more.

To coin another phrase from that athletic apparel company: Just do it!

Reprinted with permission from Peter L. McCormick

HAVERLAND BLACKROCK CORP.

The innovators in Golf Course Construction can rebuild and recontour your greens and have them back in play immediately!

THE
BIG
ROFF
SOD

LASER
GRADING

PEOPLE

INSTALLATION:

Tees, Greens, Fairways, and Athletic Facilities

- USGA PUTTING GREEN RENOVATION ■



9819 STATE ROAD 7 ■ BOYNTON BEACH, FL 33437
(561) 369-7994 ■ FAX (561) 364-1118