focus on TECH

Web browsers, Norton and Paint.NET software in the news

By Art Snyder

Whatever aspect of your business that has your attention, from new soft-play attractions to a spiffy Web site that's a 24/7 beacon of customer convenience, you can mind things better with the latest technology. That's why we're here, to help you maximize your business potential, and profits. To those ends, we have reviews of new Web browsers, the Paint.net graphics program, Norton Internet software and more. Read on, for all the details.

Browser news

As you ramp up your business-to-business ("B2B," as it's called) activities, you learn right away that in today's demanding business environment, the right Web browser makes for easy, quick, convenient and safe Internet experiences. Whether you pay your rink utility bills, receive vendor invoices or monitor your rink Web site, you appreciate a browser that is up to the task. Fortunately, the latest releases from Firefox, Internet Explorer and Opera stand apart as the top browsers. As free downloads, no less, they all are suited to your use for rink needs. Frankly, all three browsers now offer a range of conveniences, security and customization that add to their value, and you'll hear persuasive arguments about which is No. 1. Very generally, Firefox is deemed best because of its easy customization to however you want it to look on screen. Internet Explorer is thought by many as the leader insofar as security goes. And Opera will have you enjoying its renowned speed with Internet tasks. As for a rink recommendation, I'm pleased with all three browsers and recommend that you download any of this trio to see how each meets your comfort level and preferences. For downloads, go to www.firefox.com, www.opera.com and www.microsoft.com/windows/ie. (If you're adventurous, do as I do and use all three, as well as browsers from Sleipnir, Avant, Google Chrome, Orca, Flock and Maxthon.)

In review: Paint.net graphics program

Free and fabulous. Those are the honest descriptives of Paint.NET.

According to a company spokesman, "Paint.NET is a free image- and-photo editing software [program]. It features an intuitive and innovative user interface, with support for layers, unlimited 'undo,' special effects and a wide variety of useful and powerful tools.

An active and growing online community provides friendly help, tutorials and plug-ins." Paint.NET version 3.36 includes several updates, and in tests of the software during recent weeks, I've come to appreciate how powerful and user-friendly Paint.NET is. It compares favorably with Photoshop Elements, the "junior" version ($100 new, $80 upgrade) of the mighty Photoshop graphics program for professionals, and Paint.NET offers everything rink operators are prone to requiring. For example, you'll take a photo of your rink to print on your fliers, and to make the photo look its best, you're probably going to click on Paint.NET choices that will balance the colors and improve contrast, to make the image "pop." Then you can crop the photo to really keep your rink image front and center, and use the clone tool to remove extraneous elements in the photo. After you save the changes, you can insert the image into any flier, newsletter, statements and other print media to make yourself known better. For more, and the Paint.NET download for Windows XP and Vista, visit www. getpaint.net.

Norton Internet security

Over the years, the venerable Norton suite of Internet programs from Symantec have established their reputation for general Internet browsing security, two-way firewalls, e-mail scanning, and anti-spyware-and -virus features, among other safety issues. For 2009, Norton has made several improvements to solidify their leadership position when you want to do business on the Internet, stay in touch with your rink customers or simply depend on your computer for everyday back-office tasks. Programs for 2009 are Norton 360, Norton AntiVirus 2009 and Norton Internet Security 2009.

The major overall improvement for Norton is in their streamlining of how their programs perform. They take much less hard drive memory, and this allows smoother, faster performance, whether fulfilling a firewall function or checking every image, file and other download for viruses and other mischief. Another plus: Norton programs each install in a minute, a big improvement for the time-pressed rink operator. A look at the programs:

•Norton 360: This comprehensive, all-in-one software security suite is a favorite, and testing has shown great strides in performance speed of the latest version of the program. Norton 360 offers protection in several areas: anti-virus, anti-spyware, e-mail scanning, anti-phishing, rootkit detection, identity protection (essential with B2B demands now), Web site authentication, network monitoring, firewall protection, automatic backup and restore, 2GB secured online storage, PC performance tune-ups and automatic updates. One subscription license is good for three computers, a money-saver. Norton 360 is $80 for one year, and $135 for two, a good value.

•Norton AntiVirus 2009 and Norton Internet Security 2009: Symantec's newest Norton security software improves operating speed for Windows XP and Vista computers, a welcome feature saving you money day in and day out. "Both programs use about 7M bytes of memory, where competing products use up to 10 times as much," a Norton spokesman said. "Symantec found that 40 percent of their users have 512M bytes of memory or less, making it important [that] security software is as light as possible." Scanning of files, including e-mails, takes much less time, thanks to tech advances that allow a program to ignore scanning any that have not changed since its last scan. Anti-spam safety-software has been made part of both AntiVirus 2009 and Internet Security 2009. Symantec offers a plug-in for Firefox and Internet Explorer browsers to warn search-engine results if a prospective Web site has malware or similar unsafe aspects. Identity protection technology also is a welcome improvement with Internet Security 2009. Norton Internet Security 2009 is $69.99, and Norton AntiVirus is $39.99.

For more information on the programs and to download them, visit www.symantec.com. (Rink operators should check the NetBackup Platform, too, to consider an online backup option.)

The Corsair Flash Voyager storage drive

Flash drives are the latest backup option (floppy disks were among the first) that allow you to save, or store, an incredible amount of documents and other files on a device that's smaller than a deck of cards. How much can a flash drive hold? Most manufacturers make models ranging from 1 GB to 32 GB. And, such drives connect to any fast USB 2.0 port for true plug-and-play performance. Better still:

Corsair Flash Voyager GT USB drive

Flash drives have no moving parts to wear out, and by their design, these drives let you save and access files in, well, a flash. Standing out among flash drives is the Corsair Flash Voyager line of USB drives. These drives are the size of a flattened cigar, and you just plug one end of a Corsair Flash Voyager drive into any USB port on your Windows XP or Vista computer; these high-speed drives are backward compatible with USB 1.1 ports, but a 2.0 port allows their speed to save immense time. Other Corsair Flash Voyager features: Their True Crypt security lets you create password-protection on your Flash Voyager. A 10-year warranty is trendsetting, and money-saving over the long haul, and a drive's water-resistant rubber casing is easy to grip. The drive is available in five sizes, from 4 to 64 GB. Prices vary, but the 8 GB model can be had for $30. For more, visit www.corsair-micro.com.

Art Snyder is a longtime RINK-SIDER contributor. He lives in Centerville, Ohio, and has used computers and technology since 1986.