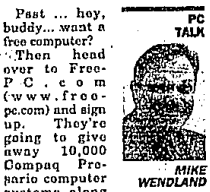


Free PC comes with a price



MIKE WENDLAND

Past ... hoy, buddy... want a free computer? Then head over to Free-PC.com (www.free-pc.com) and sign up. They're going to give away 10,000 Compaq Presario computer systems along with free Internet access.

What's the catch? Well, for starters, you have to be demographically desirable. No kids or senior citizens. You need to make enough money that you could afford to buy one of the sub-\$1,000 machines. And, here's the biggest catch of all in my book, you have to be willing to give away your privacy.

At last count, I've received 93 e-mails from readers of my column or Internet age asking me what I thought about this much-publicized Free-PC.com site. In it for real, the e-mails invariably ask: Is it a good deal?

My answer is ... yes and no.

Yes, a well-known Internet promoter named Bill Gross really does plan to give away the computer systems.

No, I don't think it's a good deal. That's because I am not willing to giving up the personal information Gross and his online cronies want.

To be eligible for one of the free Presario systems, users must promise to use the computer at least 10 hours per month and to view advertisements that will be displayed constantly down the right side of the 15-inch screen, whether they are connected to the Internet or not.

Free-PC.com says it has figured out a way that lets them track just how often the computers are used, what they're used for and, in particular, what

advertisements users read and what products they buy online.

The people behind the promotion say the marketing information collected from users will be kept separate from their actual identities. They explain that the data collected from 10,000 people is valuable to advertisers because it allows them to measure carefully what online pitches people best respond by actually buying.

How valuable? You may be surprised. The Compaq system being given away retails for under \$1,000. But can you imagine the price break Free-PC.com gets when buying so many, 10,000 at one time? Thus, it turns out that those free PCs aren't as valuable as the demographic information collected.

Gross at much as admits it. "Free-PC is the breakthrough first product to start an inevitable trend," Gross said in a statement. "Merchants will pay to reach you, so they essentially will subsidize the cost of the PC, indirectly."

My question to you, dear reader, is are you so anxious to get something for free that you're willing to be thus reached?

I am amazed at the value of current demographic information collected from the Internet. I have a free e-mail newsletter that I make available through my Web site. Right now, I have some 2,500 subscribers. Once a month, I send out some Internet and computer news.

Hardly a week goes by that I am not contacted by some mail order company interested in buying the list of my subscribers.

"Those names are worth a lot," explained one Internet marketer, "because they are qualified. People responded to your subscription offer and you have their current and valid e-mail addresses." This marketer offered me \$3 a name for every name on the list.

I didn't sell, nor will I, no mat-

ter how high the price goes.

I'm not against advertising. I sell ads on my site, even on my newsletter. Advertising is what pays for the time it takes to put together Web sites.

But the ability technology now gives us to track and collect and store data on Internet buying habits is just too Big Brotherish, at least in my book.

So, as to the Free-PC offer ... sorry, I'm not interested. And I urge you to think it over, too. But if you're willing to trade your privacy for free stuff, go ahead.

Here are some other free sites you may be interested in.

■ Net Zero (www.netzero.com) - This is an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that gives you free Internet access. The company requires users to look at a lot of ads and offer up demographic and buying information.

■ Free E-Mail (http://www.emailaddresses.com) - There are lots of advertising-supported free e-mail services. This site lists more than 850 of them.

■ Reminder Service (http://www.rememberr.com) - This site lets you store reminders about birthdays, meetings, anniversaries, whatever. You get an e-mail reminder as the date approaches. They promise to keep your name confidential but they collect demographic information that can be shared.

Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV Newschannel stations across the country. His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on WXYT-Radio AM1270. His latest book, "The Complete No Geek Speak Guide to the Internet," is available in bookstores or through his Web site at <http://www.pemike.com>

Birmingham, newly appointed Oakland County sheriff. House Republicans shot down a series of Democratic amendments on nearly party-line votes. Without debate, both chambers gave the bills immediate effect; otherwise they wouldn't become law until April 1, 2000. The House votes were 96-11 and 95-12.

Here's how Eccentric area representatives voted:

YES - Mike Bishop, R-Rochester; Patricia Godchaux, R-Birmingham; Bob Gosselin, R-Troy; Ruth Johnson, R-Holly; John Pappageorge, R-Troy; Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield; Andrew Raczkowski, R-Farmington Hills; Marc Shulman, R-West Bloomfield.

NO - none.

Residents will get tax cut in 2000

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER
richard@oakhome.com.net

Michigan residents will see their personal income taxes cut as the year 2000 opens.

"You'll need this magnifying glass," said Sen. Chris Dingell, D-Trenton, as he passed out tiny magnifying glasses to the press gallery. His point: Democrats would have cut taxes even more by raising personal exemptions.

He got public disagreement from Cliff Braley, a Midland truck driver who won the nickname of "the 35th senator" for his letters advocating the Republicans' across-the-board tax rate cut.

"In theory," Braley said, the Democrats' idea of raising exemptions is good, but "in practice it is nothing more than the

distribution of tax burden on to those who are trying to get ahead in life."

The House on Feb. 9 and the Senate on Feb. 10 split up a package of bills and gave final passage to Gov. John Engler's 1998 proposal to cut personal income tax rates from the current 4.4 percent to 3.9 percent over five years, 0.1 percent a year.

The Senate votes were 33-1 and 35-1. Lone dissenter was Alma Wheeler Smith, D-Salem, who argued that both parties' plans would cut revenue and cause universities to hike tuitions.

Missing the votes was Sen. Bill Bullard Jr., R-Milford, who had an excused absence. One Senate seat is vacant due to the resignation of Michael Bouchard, R-

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NO - none.

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA

Farmington City Council
23600 Liberty
8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 15
(248) 474-5500

Agenda items include the following:

- Public hearing, regarding City Recreation Master Plan - 1999-2003.

- Request by Kimco Realty Corp. for ground sign replacement in the Central Business District.
- Request for proclamation from Commis on Children, Youth and Families, for Parenting Awareness Month.
- Request by resident for a change in signage and increased

parking enforcement on Oakland Street.

- Consideration for approval regarding Request for Renewal Proposal (RRP) of cable television franchise.
- Consideration of adoption of City Recreation Master Plan, 1999-2003.



Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

Public Meeting with DEQ Management Team

Tuesday, February 23

4 - 6 p.m. Top DEQ officials available for 1-on-1 discussion
6 - 7 p.m. Public meeting on general environmental issues

Madonna University
Kresge Hall
36600 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia

(For more information, call 517-241-7397)

Medicare Blue offers great benefits!

The Medicare Blue Enhanced Basic option includes prescription, vision and hearing care:

- Prescription drug coverage: small copayments for prescription drugs or refills (50% or \$10 generic, \$20 brand name). \$400 annual maximum (\$100 per quarter).
- Vision Care: an annual eye exam for a \$10 copayment plus an annual discount on frames and lenses for glasses.
- Hearing Care: an annual hearing exam with a \$10 copayment

Medicare Blue covers everything Medicare does — and more — for no monthly premium!

Or, choose the Premier option and for \$30 a month* you get increased prescription coverage and an annual vision allowance.

If you live in Michigan,* and are eligible for Medicare, then Blue Care Network Medicare Blue is the health care plan for you! Medicare Blue's network of carefully screened medical professionals in your community includes more than 4,000 doctors and 41 hospitals. Chances are your doctor's already part of the plan!

To learn more about Medicare Blue, come to one of our free educational seminars. Call us to reserve your space:

1-888-333-3129 TDD 1-800-257-9980
ext. 600 (toll free) (for hearing disabled)

Medicare Blue Educational Seminars

Berkley Wednesday, Feb. 17 9:30 a.m. at Denny's Restaurant 28939 Woodward Ave.	Rochester Wednesday, Feb. 17 2 p.m. at Bill Knapp's 3010 W. Walton Blvd.
Birmingham Tuesday, Feb. 16 2:30 p.m. at Original House of Pancakes 33703 S. Woodward	Royal Oak Monday, Feb. 22 3 p.m. at Royal Oak Public Library 222 E. 11 Mile Rd.
Bloomfield Thursday, Feb. 18 2:30 p.m. at Big Boy 6545 15 Mile Rd.	Southfield Wednesday, Feb. 24 2 p.m. at Big Boy 25555 Grodan
Clarkston Friday, Feb. 19 2:30 p.m. at Big Boy 6440 Dixie Highway	South Livonia Monday, Feb. 22 2 p.m. at Bill Knapp's 32955 Plymouth Rd.
Novi Thursday, Feb. 18 9:30 a.m. at Big Boy 26401 Novi Rd.	Troy Tuesday, Feb. 16 2 p.m. at Denny's 1935 E. Long Lake
Oak Park Thursday, Feb. 18 9:30 a.m. at Baker's Square 26660 Greenfield Rd.	Wednesday, Feb. 17 9:30 a.m. at Big Boy 2995 E. Long Lake
Pontiac Tuesday, Feb. 23 11 a.m. at Howard Dell Senior Center 345 Edison St.	Waterford Wednesday, Feb. 17 2:30 a.m. at Big Boy 5834 Highland
Thursday, Feb. 25 11 a.m. at Pontiac Public Library 60 E. Pike St.	Wednesday, Feb. 24 9:30 a.m. at Big Boy 5834 Highland


Blue Care Network Medicare Blue

* To become a Medicare Blue member, you must live in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb or Washtenaw County. You must be eligible for Medicare Parts A and B and continue to pay your Medicare Part B premium. You must receive your care from a Medicare Blue provider, except for emergency or certain urgently needed care.

Blue Care Network of Michigan is a nonprofit corporation and an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.