

May 6, 2004

FROM THE DESK OF DAVID POGUE

The Good-News High-Tech Times

We live in an era of nonstop bad news. In the high-tech world alone, we've had to contend with an unprecedented surge of Windows viruses, spyware, and spam -- and that's not even counting the daily deluge of bad news about the war, the environment, corporate corruption, antibiotic-resistant bugs, and so on.

Well, this week, there's nothing but good news. Call today's newsletter the Good-News High-Tech Times.

* After nearly 20 years of maintaining a proprietary email system, America Online has finally opened up its email format so that you can download your messages using standard email programs like Outlook, Outlook Express, and Mac OS X Mail. (Technically speaking, what AOL now offers are so-called IMAP servers.)

Thanks to Leo Laporte of TechTV's "The Screen Savers" for publicizing this Web site, <http://members.aol.com/adamkb/aol/mailfaq/imap>, which shows you how to configure your email program step by step.

* Speaking of opening the kimono: Remember how, a few months back, I expressed my horror that Diebold's touch-screen voting machines, which one in five Americans will use in this fall's elections, were failing every security test? Its technicians make changes to the machines' software AFTER inspection by local election boards. The machines' software is not made available for public inspection--an unacceptable situation in what's supposed to be a democracy. And incredibly, these machines produce no paper record of the votes.

They're also buggy. During California's presidential primary in March, machines in more than half of San Diego County's precincts malfunctioned.

I'm happy to report that the nation is finally waking up. Many states, as well as Federal lawmakers, are considering legislation that requires voting machines to leave a paper trail. Better yet, California secretary of state Kevin Shelley had the guts to ban or decertify tens of thousands of Diebold machines across California. He's even considering filing criminal or civil charges against the company.

My guess is that if the defiant, unhelpful Diebold doesn't start showing some humility, fixing its work, and letting the public see what it's doing under the hood, California will be only the first state of many to get wise.

* Ever heard of eFax? You sign up for a free fax number. When people send you faxes, they're auto-forwarded to your e-mail In box, where you can read them, trash them if they're junk, or print them out only if necessary. Not only do you save paper and ink, but you don't need a fax machine or a second phone line--and you get your faxes wherever you happen to be in the country.

Unfortunately, eFax carries a hidden price: you also get a wall of spam taller than the Empire State Building. The fax feature is just a come-on so they can snag your email address.

faxaway.com

—they provide a phone number that you can give to your friends—but you pay \$1 a month, and you don't get spam. Incoming faxes go straight to your Mac or Windows e-mail program. You can also SEND faxes by email, just by using the phone number as an email address (like 12125551212@faxaway.com); sending costs about a dime. I've used this service for about a year now, and I absolutely love it.

* App... jukebox... Windows... just filled with good news. Even if you don't buy music online, this is a truly great piece of music-
But if... where... even juicier perks. The new iMix feature lets mere mortals like you and me post our favorite playlists right onto the iTunes service, discover new music and to join the community of music fans.
You... four-... in the iTunes Music Store on five different computers (instead of three, like all other online music stores), which is a big deal in... e music store now offers 700,000 songs (instead of 500,000, like its rivals), including the entire Disney catalog.

“...I
absolutely
love it.”

Yes, ladies and gents, there's nothing but good news this week. And that's good news in itself.