

Listen to what your computer has to say

Greg Seebalt was one of my mentors back in 1990 and one night he showed me his new \$5,000 multi-media PC at his house.

The big deal about this cutting edge system was that it had sound! This personal computer had a set of speakers on it and he could even play the newest album on these new small records called CDROMs.

Yep, 19 years ago I was just beginning to build my musical CD collection and Greg was already playing them on his computer. This was not only leading edge back then but bleeding edge. It took him days to find and tweak the right device driver for the \$100 sound card that ran under Windows 3.1.

I asked him, "Why the heck do you need sound and speakers on a computer?" He told me, "We'll be talking and watching movies on computers someday soon, Deans." The son of a gun was right and 19 years later I get bugged if a computer does not have speakers attached to it.

Audio inputs and outputs have been standard features on both desktops and laptops for almost a decade now. Laptops have the speakers built into them and most desktops come with external speakers by default. The new MacIntosh desktops have the speakers built right into the monitor like the one we have at our home.

Now that I am adding videos to my YouTube channel (econ-consultant) on a weekly basis and still keeping up with our economic downfall by tracking the latest news from other YouTube channels like "visionvictory" and "awakened1," computer sound is an absolute necessity.

I utilized sound again during the making of another virtual home tour of our latest rental home by uploading it to YouTube.com which is featured at www.BrenhamHomeRental.com.



John Deans

com. This tour had me talking all the way through the house about its features and appliances.

When my son Dustin was tracking the Islamic terrorists in Iraq a few years ago I lived for him to call me on Skype (Voice over Internet Proto-

col [VoIP] provider) and hear his digital voice to know he was still alive and kicking. With my microphone equipped headset I was able to talk him down from some God-awful experiences and hear him start to calm down after some rough missions.

Digital sound has become critical in my business dealings for years now. This last closing on a foreclosed house brought some concerns on who would pay the \$5,300 in back taxes to Willy Dillworth at the Washington County Tax Appraisal office.

At the start of the closing meeting I whipped out my iPhone, started the recorder program purchased from the App Store at iTunes.com, and started recording everyone's voice at that meeting.

Pursuant to Texas law I notified all attendees that we were all being recorded digitally and then asked, "So just to verify,

the seller is paying these back taxes as stated the contract, right?" They agreed, it was recorded, and that was that.

Just to be sure I verified with Willy just last week that they had actually paid them. They did. I still think the voice recording act helped.

For several years now I have provided an online training service to my clients at VTC.com which stands for Virtual Training Company. VTC was established in 1996 and it provides online software training courses which are basically movies with sound showing you exactly what to do with over 500 software packages.

In other words, you just sit, watch, and listen to the instructor as they move the mouse and train you via the Internet.

I cannot remember the last time I inserted a musical CD into a stereo to listen to music. Ten years ago my wife and I converted our 200+ CD library to MP3 files and saved all the albums and songs to digital folders and musical files. From that time on we have listened to our favorites like U2 and Led Zepelin on our computer's speakers or headphones.

Now we have transferred well over 1,000 songs to our iPhones which double as iPods. That means now we are able to

instantly access any song over our earphones that we have ever purchased. When we want some good tunes just playing in the background we fire up iTunes on the iMac and start up a shuffle of our favorite music.

Sound quality has really improved over the past several years. Computer speakers now come with sub woofers, Surround Sound, Dolby quality and even DFX effects.

One of my clients even has a seven speaker system with a 20 lb. subwoofer pumping out 200 watts of sound power.

Sad to say but I make at least \$100 a month fixing sound problems on computers. The sad part is I only have to do one of two things: 1) un-mute the sound by clicking the speaker icon in the lower right system tray or 2) physically turn up the volume on the speakers.

Yes, I do charge them for it since they'll remember to check that for sure next time.

I have dumped my expensive Plantronics headset which connected to my laptop via USB for my iPhone earbud set since it

quickly and easily inserts into the audio jack. The USB headset took too long to initialize and come online whereas the audio jack insertion was instantaneous.

Sound cards are not like graphic cards since you do not need all that extra memory and cooling fans integrated on the interface card. The money is spent on the speakers, subwoofer, and power to make the sound strong and crisp. Logitech and Boston Acoustics makes some

really good speaker sets that are just under \$100.

Bottom line: Computer sound has been around for almost 20 years now so listen to what those bits and bytes have to say.

Next week's column: Data retention.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.