update along with the release of Windows XP SP2, but it won't get major new features (like, say, tabbed browsing). Despite complaints that the lack of updates is slowing online development, Microsoft says it won't overhaul IE completely until it releases Longhorn.

WORD BACKUP. If you've ever edited and saved a document in MS Word, then wished you could go back to the original document, you might consider the automatic backup feature. Go to Tools | Options and the Save tab and check "Always create backup copy." Then, any newly saved copy will first create a backup copy in case you want to revert to that previous copy. One such backup copy is maintained.

REGISTRY FIRST AID — A Registry Panacea

Don't mess with the registry! That's good advice for inexperienced computer users and for many of the more experienced as well. If there's any area in your computer that can get you into serious trouble quickly, the registry is the place! This "palace of the gods" is a database that basically controls the functions of all the hardware and software in your computer. It is the mystical master puppeteer that pulls all the strings. Improperly eliminate or invalidate any of its settings and you can find yourself with a computer in dire need of repair.

Now all these caveats are especially distressing when you consider that disregarding its fragility the registry does need regular intervention and care. As you change or eliminate hardware and software, in spite of the most precocious uninstallers, lots of junk gets left behind in the registry. In time, it becomes a trash can of invalid application paths, non-functional dll's, mutually interfering commands, and a host of other inappropriate entries that can seriously slow down and crash your system.

There's no scarcity of utilities that were created to solve these problems by scanning the registry and eliminating the junk. I have examined an impressive number of them and up to now have found drawbacks in all that I have tried. The most common problems they share to one degree or another include:

1. Some are overly aggressive and offer to eliminate valid and necessary items along with the bad.

2. Some are insufficiently aggressive and leave behind lots that should have been discovered.

3. Some give little or no reason for the cleanup choices they have made.

4. Some offer no explanations at all and without further permission from you will delete what *they* consider should be deleted.

For these and other similar reasons I have grown to distrust utilities designed to cleanup and correct the registry. I have painfully experienced the agony of trying to correct their serious mistakes. None-the-less, I always approached each new registry correction utility with an open mind, albeit with extreme caution.

I have used my favorite registry search utility, Regseeker, from time to time to look for software entries from programs I knew no longer existed on my computer. Each and every time it turned up a whole slew of registry entries I knew no longer belonged there. When Windows XP came out, I installed it over my previous Windows 98, so I could only imagine how much Win98 garbage probably remained in the registry. Along with the many additions and subtractions in software I make from time to time in my user group evaluations, I felt sure that my registry probably needed an enema but I had not found the utility I trusted to do the job.

Then along came the recommendation for Registry First Aid from a noted columnist I trusted. I approached the task with my usual skepticism. The installation was a breeze and the utility was completely intuitive. I permitted it to do a registry scan and it reported back the number of errors found in each of the selectable areas of invalid paths, invalid fonts, invalid help files, auto run programs, invalid known dll's, obsolete start menu items, invalid application paths, invalid shared dll's and unused software entries— a pretty darn complete menu!

The results were astounding! Under the most error prone area of all, *invalid paths*, Registry First Aid uncovered over two thousand errors. Impossible, I thought. Each category of scan allows you to bring up a detailed list of the errors it found, the cause of the error, allows you to interactively access that area of the registry where the error exists if you wish, and recommends you either delete the item or retain it. Astoundingly, if the item can be corrected to reflect a valid path, it offers to do so and shows you the valid correction it has selected. There is no utility I have ever seen that so thoroughly scanned the registry, reported so completely it's findings, and recommended a valid course of action for each and every error.

The final test I gave it took the better part of a full day. I investigated individually each and every one of the more than two thousand entries and suggested corrections and astonishingly discovered every single one of them to be valid! I was convinced. At long last I had found the utility I had searched for unsuccessfully for years.

On each and every error it finds, Registry First Aid permits you to select or deselect the recommended action, or eliminate it altogether. After you have made your decisions, it will carry out all the recommendations you have selected and will either eliminate, correct or ignore the registry errors in one fell swoop.

Registry First Aid will also allow you to search the registry for any word or term you specify. It also offers advanced settings that can be controlled by the more expert among us. Any way you slice it, Registry First Aid is the utility we have long awaited— a true panacea!

Registry First Aid is published by Rose City Software (rosecitysoftware.com). You can download a free trial version and purchase it for $21. This amazing utility has our complete and wholehearted recommendation. On a scale of 1 to 10, it gets a 12! 💻

Bargain Software?

by Linda Gonse, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group

Probably you, and millions of others, have received e-mail offers with subject lines similar to these:Unbeatable software deals, Amazing prices on software; Take 95% discounts on Adobe, Microsoft, Corel products from Putnam's Stuff Store; Receive discount ticket on Corel, Adobe, Microsoft software from Koenig's Stuff Store; Get software at rock bottom prices.

What's more you may have seriously considered purchasing the programs described in the e-mails at prices that you've only seen in your dreams. Here's an example in one message: Looking for inexpensive high-quality software? We might have just what you need. Windows XP Professional 2002, $50; Adobe Photoshop