

Stuff for the small office

by Jules Older

Let's face it: Vermont is a wild place, and in wild places, you had better learn to expect the unexpected.

You had better *plan* for the unexpected as well, and one of the best ways to plan for the inevitable power loss is to buy the new **Grundig FR200G emergency radio**. It picks up AM, FM and shortwave, and it runs on AC, battery *and wind-up*. Yes, it comes with a crank; two minutes of cranking gives an hour or so of clear reception. There's even a light, so you can use it to find those hurricane lamps that you stored on a high shelf somewhere.

Speaking of wild, that's how I get when my computer doesn't work. That's why, in my last column, I ragged on Symantec's **Norton SystemWorks**. I couldn't get it to boot from OS X; it always reverted to Classic. When I called Symantec, they told me, "It works from X, but it boots from 9. Apple isn't ready to release the code for X to us."

I'm both happy and relieved to tell you that Symantec has solved its problems. Systemworks 3.0 actually does what it's supposed to do; protect your computer from corruption, invasion and error. What a relief to have it back!

Phones are not as sexy a tool as computers, but they're every bit as essential. And like computers, phones just keep improving. The big news is the continual upgrading of cell phones, but since I live in the Kingdom, where reception is, at best, spotty, I still don't have one. Yes, there are times a cell would be handy, but I kinda enjoy the perverse pleasure of remaining cell-free.

What I do have is a plethora of home phones, most of them headset models. There is no greater gift you can give your neck and back than a good headset. Suddenly, you can type and talk without emulating a contortionist. And if it's a cordless model, you can file and pace and do the dishes, as well.

When it comes to headsets, I admit to a prejudice in favor of one brand — Plantronics. They always work, and they always have. My newest models are the **Plantronics CT12 2.4Ghz Cordless** and the **CA10 Cordless**. Both give good reception. Both are lightweight and easy to carry. And both have faults.

The CT12 is hard to remove from its base station; the CA10 has a tendency to temporarily separate from its clothing clip. But both work better than any other cordless I've tested. And the CT12 is filled with features: caller ID, 5.5 hours of talk-time, programmable memory

and more.

Stiff necks and spasming backs aren't the only afflictions that befall the deskbound. As a writer who spends most of his days doing what I'm doing now, pecking away at a computer, I live in fear of the writer's disease — carpal tunnel syndrome. When my aging Apple keyboard demanded more and more force to type, I switched to the **Logitech MX Duo cordless keyboard and mouse**.

The keyboard requires far less force than the Apple, and the mouse is the best I've tried. Using advanced optical technology, it runs on any smooth surface, so I could finally throw away that nasty mouse pad. Both the mouse and keyboard are cordless, which means less clutter on my desk and the freedom to move around when I type. Nice. Very nice.

There are other things you can do to protect your wrists that don't require a purchase. The less you type, the better off you are. So it follows that any typing shortcuts you can employ, the better off you are.

I use my computer's **AutoCorrect** function to save keystrokes. When I type in a shortcut, AutoCorrect changes it to a full word or phrase. Here's what I mean:

jox – Jules Older

sp – Ski Press

wdnt – wouldn't

ny – New York

thx – thanks

thisx – This is Jules Older in Albany, Vermont, the Soul of the Kingdom.

Test it for yrslf (yourself).

I've tested a number of products from Zelco, the company made famous by its **Itty Bitty Book Light**. The light is a marriage saver — you read while your spouse soundly sleeps. But skip the model with the built-in talking microchip. True, you can record notes on it, but how useful is 10 seconds worth of notes?

Then I tried the Zelco **Bookmark Dictionary**. A bookmark with built-in dictionary? Sounds cool, so I tried it out. It makes an excellent bookmark and a fair dictionary. Here's what it got right in the novel I was reading: cosmology, metaphysical, primordial, riparian, merganser. Here's what it didn't know: hellacious, naïf, anadromous, schizoid. By the way, anadromous means migrating up rivers from the sea, and the book was *The River Why*.

Jules Older's newest adult book is **BACKROAD & OFFROAD BIKING**; his latest for kids is **ICE CREAM**.