



# CONSULTING MATTERS

A publication of the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Independent Computer Consultants Association  
www.iccadelval.org

April 2004

## From the President

### Warranties and Support Agreements

by Keith Mast  
Mast Consulting, LLC  
President  
ICCA/Delaware Valley



Keith Mast  
Mast Consulting, LLC  
President  
ICCA Delaware Valley

**There aren't too many stores where you can purchase an appliance or computer or car and *not* be offered an extended warranty.**

I recently purchased an inkjet printer from staples and they offered me an extended warranty. The printer was \$199 and the extended warranty another \$49. I declined the warranty when the sales guy asked me. And again when the cashier asked. AND AGAIN WHEN THE SALES MANAGER ASKED.

I don't always decline these extended warranties. But my first inclination is to say "no thanks." I remember reading something in Consumer Reports that supports this decision. But, I don't always say "no." Especially for higher priced items like computers and automobiles. In those cases, I usually BUY an extended warranty.

I wondered how other ICCA members handle extended warranties. And I wondered how members handle maintenance and support on the products they install and develop. So I created the "Warranties and Support Agreements" survey and sent to our members (and a handful of other consultants). Below are the results of the 25 people who responded.

Take a few minutes to review the statistical results and the individual comments. I think you will find the information interesting and useful.

#### When you are offered an extended maintenance agreement by a manufacturer, how do you respond?

Never consider it	4%
Consider it, but rarely buy	60%
Sometimes buy depending on terms	36%
Usually buy it	0%

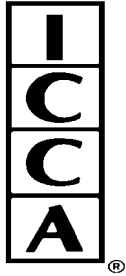
#### Have you have purchased a maintenance agreement in the past? Click all that apply.

Small appliance (blender)	2
Large appliance (washer)	9
Small electronic device (port CD player)	2
Auto (extended warranty)	11
Computer	15
Printer	1
Other	4

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**Meeting  
Information  
610-394-9090**

**info@iccadelval.org  
www.iccadelval.org**

6:00 P.M.      Networking & Cash Bar  
7:00 P.M.      Dinner  
8:15 P.M.      Meeting & Program

Entire Evening Prepaid	\$30 Members	\$40 Guest
Entire Evening at Door	\$40 Members	\$45 Guest
Networking/Speaker	Free Members	\$5 Guest

**First time guests pay member rates.** Prepayment must be received and cancellations for refunds must be made by Monday before meeting. Credit Cards accepted (MC, Visa, Discover). If there is more than one person in your party, we request that you pre-pay. Note that making a reservation is a promise to pay. "No-Shows" will be billed.

Mail Check Payable to:  
ICCA Delaware Valley  
125 N. Highland Avenue  
Lansdowne, PA 19050

**Meeting Locations:  
(Please call the hotel for directions.)**

**Philadelphia Airport Hilton**

215-365-4150  
4509 Island Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA

**DoubleTree Guest Suites**

610-834-8300  
640 W. Germantown Pike  
Plymouth Meeting, PA

**Clairon Hotel**

856-428-2300  
Route 70 & I-295  
Cherry Hill, NJ

**Holiday Inn Select**

302-792-2700  
630 Naamans Road  
Claymont, DE



**TOP TOPICS at  
ICCA DelVal  
2003-2004**

by George Smith, GRS Associates

The March 11th joint meeting with **TEMPO** was a great success. Long time Del Val member, **Audry Jaffe**, presented '**Enabling our clients to manage change**' to the ~45 attendees. She was kept long after the formal meeting answering questions.

For our April meeting, we will be in Cherry Hill. Frequent guest, **Michael Revness** of **Kurtz&Revness, P.C.**, will discuss '**Staying out of Litigation**'. Now if there is something we all want to know how to do, this is it! I'm looking forward to a good turnout. Mark your calendars for April 8th.

In May, join us at the Plymouth Meeting Doubletree for a presentation by Alyce Eisler of eLearning Designs and Heidi Mercher of MC2 Interactive. This duo gave a very popular presentation on Usability and Design in 2001. Don't miss their followup presentation in which they explore and explain complex navigation and architecture issues and solutions.

I want to remind you again that **Kathleen Conti** (kconti@websquared.com) has agreed to take over as program chair next season. It's not too early to start sending her program, speaker, and meeting location ideas.

See you all on the 11th.

**Join the ICCA!**

**Become a part of the region's premier association for Independent Computer Consultants.**

**Membership rates are:**

- \* \$100 Local Chapter Dues
- \* \$175 National dues for 1 person firm
- \* \$225 National dues for 2-9 person firm
- \* \$275 National dues for 10+ person firm
- \* \$25 National Processing fee  
(1st time only)

This Translates to:

- \* \$300 for a first-time 1 person firm
- \* \$275 subsequent years for 1 person firm

Call 610-394-9090 to request an application, or fill out membership application on line at **www.icca.org**

# Action Packed

by Preston Terrell, Allsystemsup.net

Being an Independent, always having the latest software can be a challenge at today's prices. Recently I found a way to legally obtain 10 licensed copies of just about every piece of Microsoft software I would ever use for my business. The secret is Microsoft's **Action Pack**. It will cost you \$299, although take a look at what you get:

- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Enterprise Edition
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Web Edition
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Terminal Services
- Microsoft Exchange 2003 Enterprise Server
- Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Developer Edition
- Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003
- Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration Server 2000 Enterprise Edition
- Microsoft Mobile Information Server 2002 Enterprise Edition
- Microsoft SharePoint Portal Server 2001
- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Microsoft Office Professional 2003
- Microsoft Office FrontPage 2003
- Microsoft Office Outlook 2003
- Microsoft Office MapPoint 2004
- Microsoft Office Visio Professional 2003
- Microsoft Office Project Professional 2003
- Microsoft Office Publisher 2003
- Microsoft Business Solutions CRM Standard Edition

As with anything there is always catch, and to take advantage of this deal Microsoft does require that you are a reseller. By filling out my name and address on a web page I became a Microsoft reseller. Does this mean I have to start selling Microsoft's products to everyone I know? No, but since I have legal access to this software and can learn about its pros and cons, I am certainly likely to recommend it should the opportunity arise.

This program makes sense. Being consultants, we are sure to have access decision makers at various companies -- large and small. Through this program, Microsoft has provided a way where even the small guy can get the feel and scope of their products without a huge investment. If more software companies offered the same type of plan, it would most likely open up new avenues of approach to a client.

\*\*\*\*\*

## About the author:

*ICCA Member Preston Terrell is the founder of Allsystemsup.net. He is a Cisco-certified (CCNP) computer networking professional possessing 7 years of experience in both WAN and LAN technologies. ASU Networking Services specializes in LAN/WAN network design, network installation, and secure Internet connectivity.*



CNTower  
Toronto, Canada

27th Annual  
ICCA  
National  
Conference

"C'Ning Your  
Business  
from New  
Heights!"

Toronto  
Canada  
June 11-13

See  
[www.icca.org](http://www.icca.org)  
for  
registration  
information

Are you interested in C'Ning Your Business from New Heights? The **27th Annual ICCA National Conference** can do just that for you. This year's conference is being held in Toronto, Canada on June 11-13, 2004. Now is the time for you to make your reservations so you can network with others and learn what you need to know in order to remain on top. Consultants must constantly invest in expanding their business skills to become more profitable and be knowledgeable of future trends. This conference will bring you together with business professionals to assist you in your business needs. You and your colleagues are invited to be part of this event.



# Here, Here! Welcome New Members

## Patricia F. Maron

PO Box 653  
Havertown, PA 19063  
610-529-2886  
pfmaron@verizonesg.net

**Expertise:** Software development, systems analysis, OOA&D

## Ralph Garlitos

### RPG Enterprises

320 Whig Lane Rd  
Pilesgrove Twp, NJ 08098  
856-769-4928  
ralph.garlitos@comcast.net

**Expertise:** Enterprise Supply Chain and Asses Mgmt Software

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## Upcoming Dinner Meeting Dates 2004

✳ **5/13 Doubletree Guest Suites**  
Plymouth Meeting, PA

**Topic:** Beyond Basic Usability in  
Programming Design

**Speakers:** Alyce Eisler of  
eLearning Designs, Inc., &  
Heidi Merscher of  
MC2 Interactive

As a follow-up to their 2001 Presentation on Basic Usability & Design, Alyce Eisler of eLearning Designs, Inc. and Heidi Merscher, MC2 Interactive, team up to explore complex navigation and information architecture design issues and solutions.



## Technology for Learning Conference 2004 Expectations, Execution, Excellence! Featuring keynote speaker Dr. Allison Rossett.

WHYY Technology Center and the National Constitution Center - Philadelphia, PA 4/26/04 8:15 a.m. - 4:45 p.m.

\$199 early registration rate through March 15, 2004. This rate is offered to our affiliate partners for this event. (**Note:** Delaware Valley ICCA is an affiliate partner)

Now in its 3rd year, the Greater Philadelphia T-Learning Conference is designed for training professionals, educators, and college professors working in the field of distance learning. The conference has become so popular that this year it's been expanded to include sessions at the National Constitution Center (just across 6th street). Join us for interactive sessions, a business panel, exhibits at our MarTECHplace, and poster sessions where graduate students can present the results of their innovative research in the field.

Interested in advertising at T-Learning? Act now before it's too late! Advertising space in the program guide is going quickly - don't lose your chance to take your message to today's cutting-edge professionals in training and development (contact Kristin Linder at [klinder@klsalesexcellence.com](mailto:klinder@klsalesexcellence.com)). More information and forms are available at <http://www.astdphl.org/t-learning/>.

✳ **6/10 Clarion Hotel**  
Cherry Hill, NJ

**Topic:** Intellectual Property and Related  
Legal Issues

**Speaker:** Fred Wilf, an attorney with  
Morgan Lewis

Digital Rights Management ("DRM") is a combination of technologies and laws designed to protect digital content from being used except as expressly allowed by the content owner. Fred Wilf, an attorney with Morgan Lewis will discuss DRM-related legal issues, and how they affect computer consultants.

# Warranties and Support Agreements (continued from page 1)

**With respect to HARDWARE that you install and/or support, do you recommend buying the manufacturer's extended warranty? (beyond the included warranty)**

Always	13%
Sometimes	73.9%
Never	13%

**With respect to SOFTWARE YOU PURCHASE and install, do you recommend buying an extended support agreement? (beyond the included support)**

Always	12.5%
Sometimes	54.2%
Never	33.3%

**Please give any specific comments about extended warranties on items you buy (appliances, electronics, autos, computers) NOT software developed.**

1. I try to avoid third-party warranty companies (e.g. only get a GM extended warranty for a GM vehicle, only get a SONY warranty for a SONY product, etc.). If the product manufacturer values its reputation and desires repeat business, it is more likely to honor the warranty in any "gray" areas than a "warranty company".
2. Whether or not I buy extended warranties depends on several different factors — 1) My experience on needing support or maintenance on an appliance or tool similar to the one I'm currently purchasing 2) The amount of time covered by the original warranty - i.e. on early pc systems/laptops the coverage time was pretty short (seems to me it was a year, maybe 2) - I extended the coverage and was glad I did. Now however, the standard coverage for my laptop is 3 years and I seldom extend it because at the end of 3 years I'm often getting a new one 3) Other factors include cost and measuring my risk - how likely am I to need it and if I do need it and don't have it - how expensive is it likely to be
3. Decision is based on price of replacement and likelihood of breakage. Don't think they are worth it on most electronic equipment, but since mother-in-law worked at auto dealership got one on my car.
4. Things like CD players or MP3 players have been well worth the bumper to bumper extended warranty, but are useless if the item is stolen. Another problem is that retailers such as Best Buy offer these warranties, but they never have the exact model available as a replacement so this is kin to bait and switch. You must ALWAYS upgrade, and then they charge you a surcharge to upgrade the warranty you already paid for. Big appliances like our treadmill were worth the extended warranty.
5. Depends on cost, vendor and personal experience working with the product when purchasing a warranty
6. Stores really push these extended warranties. My gut tells me to say NO and I can vaguely remember reading a consumer reports article that says "don't do it." I make an exception for computers and autos.
7. In general, extended warranties for appliances are overpriced. This has not been so bad for computers, but I have never bought an extended warranty for a computer on my own account. For clients, I have sometimes advocated buying an extended warranty, just for their own peace of mind.
8. I don't think most products really need an extended warranty because they rarely need repairs. However, I would make an exception for laptop computers, especially for people who travel a lot, because they can easily get bumped around.
9. On more sophisticated high use products the extended warranty can save you money over the life of the product.
10. If the item has a long enough life span, I'll get the maintenance. If it is likely to last until I would replace it anyway, I skip it.
11. My experience is that I have paid more for warranties than I needed them. I used to buy them routinely, but hardly ever do anymore.
12. There are only a couple companies that offer a support agreement that I feel is worth its money. Dell tops that list with its 3 year computer replacement. If a client drops their laptop and it cracks the screen, dell will have a van in their driveway the next day, not bad for \$179.00. I also like Sun Microsystems 3 year warranty for servers. If a part goes you get a new one overnighted to you. Beyond those two companies I usually do not get warranties.
13. I continue to pay for a homeowner's warranty which was originally included with the purchase of my home. It has saved me quite a bit on maintenance of the HVAC system, which is almost 30 years old. For most other things, I've found I saved money by not purchasing an extended warranty. For some things, however, I recommend continuing support, particularly for Anti-Virus software. Without a subscription it would be out of date quickly and useless as a result.
14. The only extended warranties I've ever purchased are for laptops. I only do this because of their propensity for getting damaged and the high part/service cost.
15. Generally the terms are not worth the cost, especially since there is so much hassle getting things serviced and there is so much worry that the manufacturer will try to get out

*(Continued on page 6)*

# Warranties and Support Agreements (continued from page 5)

of the agreement. After a car dealer cheated me on a clutch job I never returned to him, and I never bought another car from a dealer. I have found it to be more economical doing without paying for the “warranty”.

## **Please give any specific comments about how you handle support agreements for software you develop.**

1. First 90 days free. Thereafter based on number of users of corp contract
2. Many have not taken me up on this, but offer a given number of hours of support for an annual support amount (use it or loose it), and my standard rate above and beyond that. most choose billing for my time as needed.
3. For years I never offered support agreements. More recently I have offered and sold them. Clients seem to have a level of comfort with them.
4. As a rule, I fix any bugs at my own cost, but charge time & materials for extensions and enhancements. So far, I haven't had such a volume of “how do you do x?” calls that I've felt the need to charge for answering them, or for a support agreement to cover that kind of thing.
5. I guarantee satisfaction on all the work I do. This covers software, hardware, installation, configuration, support, repairs, and so on. My clients are reassured by the offer. There have only been a couple very minor instances over the past 4 years where I've had to correct something at a client's request.
6. Clients usually look for ongoing support on the more sophisticated applications. I have found that they are looking for the security that a software support agreement provides. Knowing that someone will be around when they have a problem.
7. I usually offer a short period during which I will correct my software (for free or within the negotiated terms or the original contract) if it does not perform against written specifications. I make sure the contract states something specific about “user acceptance testing” and how long it will last. After that time period specified by the original contract, or if there are no written specifications, if the client wants changes (at this point they are considered “changes” and not “corrections”), they have to pay for them at the current hourly rate or through a separately negotiated contract. For ongoing support, I usually offer an open ended contract through which they can call for support and pay as they go on an hourly basis.
8. Just fix it at no cost.
9. To date, I have not offered any fixed support agreements. Any support provided after the final project acceptance phase is based on standard hourly billing.

10. Most software I develop is on a time and material basis and is therefore generally sold as a service, not subject to a specific warranty. After installation service beyond helpful phone calls is again on a time and material basis.
11. We offer a support agreement for “Service Support” that is sold in blocks of hours. Examples would be a 25hr., 50hr., or 100hr. Support Blocks sold at a discount based on the number of hours purchased ahead of time. This is a win - win scenario as it offers us a quantity of billable hours already purchased and it offers the customer a nice discount for consulting hours they know will be purchased throughout the year anyway.

## **Thank you to all those who responded.**

*Christopher Johnson, Foundation Software Technology, Inc., George Letkiewicz, Alyce Eisler, eLearning Designs Inc., David Rawheiser, Rawheiser Consulting, Rich Moyer, MREI Consulting, Bandwave Systems, Keith Mast, Mast Consulting, LLC, Dirk Goldgar, DataGnostics, Debbie Dahl, Conversational Technologies, Michael Beyer, Darkstreak Computing & Innovations, Jim Fowler A.R.E Solutions Inc., Pete Gulotta, Bobcat Consulting, LLC, Cindy Cole, CCAM, John Erthal, Alphon Business Solutions, Inc. , Preston Terrell, Allsystemsup, Inc., Ken Keefer, Keefer Consulting, Inc., Choice Computing Services, Tim Traylor, Traylor Associates, LLC, Stratford Technologies, Inc., Ron Jones, Precision Technologies, Michael P. McAndrews, Logic Choice, Inc.*

## **ICCA Delaware Valley Shirts**

Size	S	M	L	XL	XXL
Color	Green	Ecru	White	Navy	

Qty \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$25      Total Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form with check payable to:

ICCA

125 N. Highland Ave  
Lansdowne, PA 19050

Or call/email your VISA/MC/Discover card number, expiration date, and total dollar amount of order to

610-394-9090      [icca@erols.com](mailto:icca@erols.com)

Shirts will be ready for pickup by the following meeting.

# Getting Help With My Business

Timothy J. Traylor, Traylor Associates, LLC

It was the end of 2002 and I was ready to start my IT consulting business. Armed with 20 years of tech experience as an employee and 'on-the-side' consultant, a basic business package (cards, letterhead, envelopes), and a nice severance package from my down-sized employer, I had everything I thought I needed to get my business started.

Fast-forward to three months later. I was coming to grips with my denial and accepting the fact that I didn't know what I was doing. I had extensive experience *in* the business but I didn't have any experience *running* a business. I needed help.

At the suggestion of a family member I contacted Temple University's Small Business Development Center (<http://www.temple.edu/sbdc/>) to see what kind of assistance they could provide. As it turned out, they had quite a bit to offer.

Temple's SBDC is part of their Fox School of Business and exists to provide assistance to individuals in starting and running their small businesses. They offer a wide variety of workshops, classes, and services, which are either free or low-cost. Services may be provided by SBDC employees, contracted consultants, or Temple students. If anyone is leery of having students work on projects, I should state that my experience is that the quality of their work has been good, and it's also reviewed by SBDC employees or consultants.

Over the past year I have taken advantage of the following SBDC offerings:

## **One-on-one Consulting:**

You are assigned a permanent consultant, who will become familiar with your business and what your specific needs are. Consultants provide guidance with your business, can help you identify informational and financial resources, and will coordinate any additional services that you may need from the SBDC. The only requirement for working with a consultant is that you have a business plan, and there is no charge for this service.

## **Classes:**

During the four-week "Preparing for Financial Success" class I began to learn how to look at my financial information as a business owner and not as a software developer. The Entrepreneurial Success Workshop Series spanned 13 weeks and was focused on attaining the business and market knowledge needed to prepare a business plan. By its completion I had gained a much better understanding of what it takes to run a business, and I knew quite a bit more about my specific industry and my competitors. I also had a much improved business plan and a clear idea of the next steps I needed to take. The cost of the classes ranged from \$95.00 for the four week class to \$270.00 for the 13-week workshop series.

## **Legal Workshop:**

The legal workshop utilizes 3<sup>rd</sup> year law students to address your specific legal needs, and the deliverables are reviewed by a practicing attorney. I took advantage of this to turn our trusty standard ICCA templates into customized contracts for my business. There is no cost for this service.

## **Creative Department:**

The Creative Department offers a variety of services that address advertising, marketing and public relations needs. I'm nearing the completion of a brochure project with this department and it's looking great. While there's no charge for the design itself, there is a \$175.00 materials charge. The prices vary depending on what service is being provided, and are very reasonable.

There are many additional classes and services that the SBDC offers. The ones that seem most applicable to our industry are:

**Government Procurement:** Classes cover the requirements and certifications needed for IT contracts. This department also offers an email notification system, which informs you of available business opportunities from federal, state, and local governments.

**Business Incubator:** Includes typical incubator services for businesses that lack equipment or meeting facilities.

**Funding:** Consultants can provide assistance with obtaining funding for your business.

My overall experience with Temple's SBDC has been very pleasant, and they have definitely helped me to develop the skills that I need to run my business. My advice is that before you drop big bucks on a high-priced business consultant, check out what Temple has to offer. You may find that you'll get exactly what you need and you'll almost certainly learn more in the process.

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## **About the Author:**

ICCA member Tim Traylor's business, Traylor Associates, LLC, is dedicated to providing Information Technology and software development services to small business owners. Tim's purpose is to provide solutions that support the needs and objectives of these businesses, utilizing technology that is appropriate for each client. Traylor Associates LLC sells solutions, not just technology.

The core service offerings of Traylor Associates include database development, MS Office automation and integration, custom application development using MS Visual Studio, internet an intranet application development, and network and infrastructure support.

# April Tech Calendar

## 8 - April

ICCA Del Val Chapter Meeting  
"Staying out of Litigation"  
Michael Revness,  
Kurtz & Revness, P.C.  
Clarion Hotel  
Cherry Hill, NJ  
6pm - 7pm Networking  
7pm - 8pm Dinner  
8pm - 9pm Presentation  
[www.iccadelval.org](http://www.iccadelval.org)

## 14 - 15 April

SecureWorld Expo  
Valley Forge convention Center  
King of Prussia, PA  
[www.secureworldexpo.com](http://www.secureworldexpo.com)

## 24 - April

JobsAndMONEY Fair 2  
Philadelphia Convention Center  
Philadelphia, PA  
[www.jobsandmoney.com](http://www.jobsandmoney.com)

## 24-26 - April

ASTD Technology for Learning  
Conference  
Expectations, Execution, Excellence!  
WHYY Technology Center and  
National Constitution Center  
Philadelphia, PA  
8:15am - 4:45am  
[www.astdphl.org/t-learning/](http://www.astdphl.org/t-learning/)

**Consulting Matters** always  
welcomes newsletter article  
submissions.

If you have an article that would  
be of interest to the computer  
consulting community, send your  
article to:  
[newsletter@iccadelval.org](mailto:newsletter@iccadelval.org).

MS-Word or plain text is preferred.  
Article submission deadline for  
the **May** Issue of Consulting  
Matters **April 23rd**.

## ICCA Delaware Valley Board of Directors Committees and Other Contacts 2004-2005

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### ICCA Disclaimer Notice

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