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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ AT&T Attack Temporary! ~ Virus Shuts Down Saudis ~ Twitter's Medium.com!
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-* Sony Confirms PSN Hack Is Fake *-
-* Digital Piracy Can Not Be Stopped! *-
-* Teens and Video Games: How Much Is Too Much *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"*****"

Can you believe that, in only a few weeks, we'll be celebrating Labor Day, the unofficial end of summer! Personally, this entire year has been nothing less than a blur. And, there's no clarity in sight with all of the personal issues we're dealing with here. One step forward, a half dozen backward. We can't seem to catch a break.

But, sometimes one must create their own breaks. So, I've taken some action with regard to some of our family issues. And, we're taking a week off, for a much-needed rest! Looking forward to it!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Teens and Video Games: How Much Is Too Much?
"*****" EA in Talks To Sell to Private Equity Firms!
Sony Confirms PSN Hack Claim Is Fake!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Teens and Video Games: How Much Is Too Much?

The gamer community had a near-miss this week in Ohio, when a 15-year-old boy collapsed after playing "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3" for up to five days straight.

The Columbus teen was rushed to the hospital with severe dehydration, where he recovered, according to a report from TV station WCMH on Aug. 7.

Players who delve too deeply into their electronic worlds can face various health risks, ranging from deep vein thrombosis, or blood clots, to severe dehydration.

For instance, in July, a Taiwanese teenager was found dead after sitting for 40 hours in an Internet cafe playing "Diablo 3." At the time, doctors speculated he died from a heart attack caused by a blood clot that formed during the long session.

And last summer, a 20-year-old man from the U.K. died from a blood clot after spending 12-hour sessions on his Xbox. His father told "The Sun" newspaper, "He lived for his Xbox. I never dreamed he was in any danger."

While these are extreme cases, they are a reminder that sitting at a computer or console for days, whether it's for "World of Warcraft" or for work, isn't healthy for anyone. But psychologists who study video games and kids say parents needn't worry about the amount of time spent gaming, unless screen time starts to affect school, health or social life. (And, of course, a stint of tens of hours gaming is likely to negatively affect schoolwork and lead to social woes.) That said, researchers remain concerned about the effects of violent content in video games, which have been linked by many studies to aggressive behavior.

These days, screens of one kind or another occupy youth for 50 hours a week, a 2010 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation reports. "It's a full-time job plus 10 hours of overtime, and that's the average," said Douglas Gentile, a psychologist and director of the Media Research Lab at Iowa State University.

Video-gaming consumed nine weekly hours for teens, the Kaiser survey found, while a Harris Poll conducted for Gentile during the same period reported 13 hours a week spent gaming on computers and consoles.

While some kids can shoot 'em up for hours, for others, too much time gaming leads to poor school performance. Recent studies have finally linked the cause and effect, showing that gaming displaces after-school academic activities such as homework and reading. A 2010 study from researchers at Denison University in Ohio, published in the journal Psychological Science, compared two groups of boys that had never owned gaming systems. They gave one group a system right away, but withheld games from the other group for four months. Boys who received the video-game system first had more teacher-reported learning problems and significantly lower reading and writing scores than the other boys.

Problems in school are relatively easy for parents to fix: Limit screen time of course, if you can get the controller out of his or her hands. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one to two hours per day in front of any electronics.

What's harder to control is violent content in video games. The Pew Research Center reported in 2008 that more than 90 percent of games rated as appropriate for children 10 years or older contained violence, including games rated "E" for everyone. (Most researchers define violence as the ability of a player to intentionally harm others in a game.)

Now most researchers will agree that video games can help as well as

harm. For example, educational games boost learning, and action games can improve vision and spatial skills. Video games have also been used successfully to teach children self-care skills for asthma and diabetes.

And then there's the primary reason people play video games: They're relaxing. Gentile thinks the flickering screen and varying sound levels trigger a primitive brain response. "One of the reasons I think we find television and video games so relaxing is they provide the attention for you. It forces you to orient to the media. You don't have to work to pay attention like you do in [a] classroom lecture," said Gentile.

But a preponderance of evidence links violent video games to an increase in aggressive behavior in teens. The behavior wasn't violent crime, like school shootings, but small yet hurtful offenses like teasing, name-calling, rumor-spreading and fist fights. In a review of 130 studies of kids and teens, Iowa State University researchers found that violent video games increased the likelihood of aggression and decreased empathy. The meta-analysis appeared in 2010 in the journal *Psychological Bulletin*.

Of course, repeated exposure to violence in any environment has a deleterious effect, Gentile noted. "Seeing violence anywhere increases the risks that a child might become involved in aggression, whether as a perpetrator or a victim," he said. But video games are phenomenal teachers. Players get immediate feedback and rewards for punishing competitors. And not only do games reward hostility, they train your brain to respond to real-life problems with aggression, research indicates.

In fact, games can prime teens to react to slights with name-calling or pushing, instead of choosing to avoid confrontation. "So when I get bumped in the hallway, I don't assume it's an accident anymore," explained Gentile. "What comes to mind first is to retaliate in some way. Those aren't the only options you have, but we never think of them because what we see over and over in the media is 'You killed my monster, now you must die.'"

But psychologist Patrick Markey's research suggests just some teens are susceptible to these effects. Markey found people with certain personality traits—those who are highly neurotic, less agreeable and less conscientious—are those more likely to become hostile from gaming. The 2010 study appeared in the journal *Review of General Psychology*.

"The truth of the matter is that most people can handle this media, but for some people with a select predisposition, these people might be a little more aggressive, more prone to an argument here and there," said Markey, a professor at Villanova University in Pennsylvania.

"The most interesting part is there is really no research that suggests video games have a different effect than TV or movies. It has empirically never been shown," said Markey. "Any media is supposed to engage us emotionally, and video games are a form of media, a form of art even."

EA in Talks To Sell to Private Equity Firms

Publishing giant EA has apparently been approached by two private equity firms about a potential sale.

Sources close to the New York Post have claimed that the company was

approached by private equity firms KKR and Providence Equity Partners over the possibility of a purchase, but emphasised that talks are at an early stage.

One source said, "It's early days," but another added that EA has "made it known they'd do a deal at \$20 a share." EA's stock has had a tumultuous ride so far this year, suffering a 37% drop. When trading closed yesterday shares were being sold at \$13.09.

It's a difficult economic time right now, and many videogame companies have experienced similar stock falls to EA thanks to increased interest in casual and social games. With a third of the company's value disappearing so far this year though, it's unsurprising that potential buyers are being sought.

A possible reason for this is the current uncertainty regarding Star Wars: The Old Republic and its free-to-play future; the most expensive videogame ever made with a rumoured cost of around \$200 million recently announced it was abandoning its subscription fee, less than a year after launching.

But what does this mean for the average gamer? At the moment, nothing. This hasn't been confirmed and even the claims state that any deal is still a long way off. But what is interesting to consider is the fact that Providence Equity Partners is a major shareholder in Bethesda's parent company, Zenimax. As a result, it's certainly a story worth keeping an eye on.

Sony Confirms PSN Hack Claim Is Fake

Update 4: Sony has given IGN the following statement:

"We've confirmed that the recent claim that PlayStation Network was illegally hacked and that customer passwords and email addresses were accessed is completely false."

All is well!

Update 3: Anonymous has deleted the Tweet claiming that it hacked the PSN. You can see the image of the Tweet as it existed in the original story below.

We're still waiting to hear back from Sony, but the removal of the Tweet is probably all the confirmation we need that this was fake. We'll update with any further developments if and when they occur.

Update 2: While this shouldn't be counted as an official comment from Sony, Shane Bettenhausen -- EGM and 1Up alum who now works for Sony's PlayStation-centric business development - Tweeted the following:

We're still waiting for official comment from Sony, but in the meantime, file Mr. Bettenhausen's comment as further confirmation that all is well.

Update: Kotaku points out that the document of leaked data linked to in the Twitter account appears to be identical to one posted on the Internet back in March.

This suggests that PSN - and the data therein - is safe, though we're

still waiting to hear back from Sony for confirmation and will update when we hear back.

Infamous hacking group Anonymous claims to have hacked the PlayStation Network again. The following was posted on Twitter:

The group linked to a lengthy document of the data they purportedly mined, including e-mail addresses and what appears to be other encrypted information.

It's important to keep in mind that this is totally unconfirmed. It's also worth noting that PlayStation Network is still up, so if this is real, it was a data leak and hasn't led to an outage (at least at this point).

We've reached out to Sony for comment and will update when we hear back.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Digital Piracy Cannot Be Stopped

From the early days of IRC to the creation of The Pirate Bay, online piracy has grown from a minor annoyance perpetrated by an underground community to a mainstream issue that impacts several industries. Internet savvy users originally shared music and videos with one another through a string of underground chatrooms, however with the rise of video-sharing website YouTube, it has become increasingly easy to watch or listen to copyrighted material on the Web for free. While Google (GOOG) does its best to remove infringing content, throughout the years users have found various techniques that allow them to bypass the Internet giant's search and destroy tools, and keep their videos online for millions to see. YouTube and similar sites are only the tip of the iceberg, however.

Each day more and more users are turning to peer-to-peer file-sharing websites that use the BitTorrent protocol, the most popular being The Pirate Bay. These websites offer users the opportunity to download millions of movies, music, games and software with a simple click of the button. For years, the United States government has attempted to shut down pirate websites, however it isn't that simple and online pirates always seem to be one step ahead of the authorities.

Even as popular services like Demonoid and Megaupload are shuttered, users will find new places to download pirated content.

As Nick Bilton of the The New York Times notes, stopping online piracy is like playing the world's largest game of Whac-A-Mole. In the arcade version of Whac-A-Mole, the game eventually ends often when the player loses. Bilton wrote. In the piracy arms-race version, there doesn't seem to be a conclusion. Sooner or later, the people who still believe they can hit the moles with their slow mallets might realize that their time would

be better spent playing an entirely different game.

AT&T Says Attack Temporarily Cut Internet Access

AT&T Inc said some business customers temporarily lost internet access because its network was targeted by unknown attackers on Wednesday.

Company spokesman Mark Siegel said that domain name system, or DNS, servers that direct traffic for AT&T customers were targeted at two locations by a distributed denial of service attack.

In such attacks perpetrators target a server with a lot of requests at the same time, making it unavailable to users.

The issue has now been resolved, he said.

Saudi Aramco Says Virus Shuts Down Its Computer Network

Saudi Arabian Oil Co (Saudi Aramco) said its computer systems had been shut down by a virus late on Wednesday, but it added that production had not been affected.

"An official source of Saudi Aramco confirmed that it had isolated electronic systems for the entire company today and cut off external access as an early precaution," said a statement in Arabic from the company.

The world's biggest oil company said that although the virus affected some computers, it did not penetrate key components of the network, which it said would return to normal operating mode soon.

"The source ... reiterated the lack of any effect at all on the work of production due to the strength of advanced protection systems," the statement added.

Rumors had spread among traders earlier on Wednesday that the state-owned company had been subjected to a hacking attack.

WikiLeaks Resumes Operations After Massive Cyberattack

A hacker group calling itself "AntiLeaks" took credit for the attacks against WikiLeaks on Twitter, claiming it targeted the website because of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's ongoing efforts to seek political asylum in Ecuador.

We are not doing this to call attention to ourselves," @antileaks said in an extended tweet.

"We are young adults, citizens of the United States of America and are deeply concerned about the recent developments with Julian Assange and his attempt at aslyum [sic] in Ecuador. Assange is the head of a new

breed of terrorist. We are doing this as a protest against his attempt to escape justice into Ecuador. This would be a catalyst for many more like him to rise up in his place. We will not stop and they will not stop us.

DDoS attacks work by targeting heavy amounts of bogus traffic at a website's host server in hopes of overloading it and forcing it offline. They're among the most common form of cyberattacks.

AntiLeaks claimed it had no relationship to the United States or other governments considered enemies of WikiLeaks. However, that hasn't stopped ongoing speculation that the attack was a response to WikiLeaks' posting of documents related to TrapWire, a counterterrorism surveillance system that collects and analyzes footage from security cameras and license plate readers.

Details about TrapWire were discovered in emails from security intelligence firm Stratfor acquired by Anonymous and leaked by WikiLeaks earlier this year. Some observers immediately labeled it a secret digital surveillance effort that's in use around the world, though recent reports have cast doubt on several of the more audacious claims made about the system.

WikiLeaks' documents regarding TrapWire are now back online.

Nexus 7 Is Great If You're Too Cheap for An iPad

Consumer Reports today added Google's Nexus 7 to its tablet rankings and concluded that while it's probably the best cheap tablet on the market, it still can't match the overall quality of the Apple iPad. Overall, the Nexus 7 scored a 79 out of 100 and did particularly well in Consumer Reports's ratings for both touch response and portability. This gives the Nexus 7 vastly superior scores than similarly-priced tablets such as the Amazon Kindle Fire and the Barnes & Noble Nook Tablet, which scored 66 and 65 respectively.

All that said, Consumer Reports said that the iPad remains the best option for users who value having the best overall tablet experience regardless of price.

With its bigger, excellent Retina display and a still-unmatched app store, the iPad still has the edge over the Nexus 7, wrote Consumer Reports's Donna L. Tapellini in a blog post. But if you want a tablet in a smaller package for a lot less money, the Nexus 7 is worth thinking about.

5 Ways to Supercharge Your Laptop For Under \$100

Whether you have a 4-year-old notebook or a shiny new system you bought yesterday, you can dramatically improve your PC's performance and productivity value for less than the cost of a nice dinner out. For less than \$100, you can purchase your choice of significant hardware upgrades that will allow you to get more done in less time and put off buying a new system for several more years.

1. Upgrade to SSD (\$80 to \$100)

There is no single upgrade that will improve your digital life more than going from a standard hard drive to an Solid State Drive (SSD). If you're still using a 7,200 rpm or (gasp) 5,400 rpm drive, you're wasting precious seconds of your life every time you boot, open a file or launch a program. Instead of twiddling your thumbs while the old-fashioned turnable-like head spins inside your hard drive, you can be up and running in your favorite programs, including heavy applications like Photoshop, in just a few seconds.

When we took a 5-year-old Dell Latitude D630 running Windows Vista on a 2.4-GHz Core 2 Duo CPU and tested it with both its original 7,200-rpm hard drive and a speedy Kingston HyperX SH100S3 SSD, it felt like we were using two different computers. On PCMark Vantage, a synthetic benchmark that measures system performance, upgrading to SSD raised the D630's overall score from 3,210 to 4,693 and its HDD score from 2,666 to 16,715.

In real-world tests, the Latitude D630's Vista boot time decreased by around 20 percent, falling from an average start time of 37.3 seconds to 31 seconds. When we tested the launch times for five popular applications (Photoshop CS5.1 opening to a 400MB TIF, Adobe Reader 10 opening to a 500 page PDF, Excel 2007 opening to a 20,000 row worksheet, Mozilla Firefox 14 and Word 2007 opening to a blank document), each program opened about three times faster after the SSD upgrade.

To see how much benefit an SSD provides on a new notebook, we opened some of the same applications and timed them on a 3rd Generation Intel Core i7 notebook, both with a 7,200 rpm 750GB hard drive and the same Kingston HyperX SH100S3 SSD. Even with a much newer, faster processor, launch times were 2 to 4 times faster after the upgrade.

Today, you can get a 120 or 128GB SSD for well under \$100. A quick glance at popular retailers such as NewEgg, Tiger Direct and Amazon shows some budget-oriented SSDs like the OCZ Agility 3 selling for under \$90 while the Samsung 830 Series, the winner of our Fall SSD roundup, can often be found on sale for \$99 or less. If you require more capacity, you can find a 256GB drive for as little as \$150.

2. Add more RAM (\$20 to \$40)

The more RAM your notebook has, the less time it must spend writing to the Windows paging file on your hard drive (or SSD) to help make up for a lack of a physical memory. Since physical memory is infinitely faster than even the fastest SSD, you want to avoid your system needing to use that paging file whenever possible. Even better, if you have some memory to spare, you can create a RAM disk which will load your favorite programs much faster than even a speedy SSD.

Most of today's notebooks come with 4GB of RAM and moving from 4GB (or less) up to 8GB can provide significant performance gains. If you have DDR3 memory, the standard type since 2009, an 8GB kits (2 x 4GB DIMMs) will cost you \$40 or less.

Since most notebooks have just two slots for RAM and come with both filled, you'll probably have to remove your existing RAM. However, if you do have a free slot, the cost of a 4GB DIMM is around \$20. To find out what kind of memory your notebook takes, either consult your owner's manual or visit an online RAM configurator like the one on Crucial Memory's home page. Removing and replacing RAM on most notebooks is as

simple as unscrewing a door on the bottom of the system, popping out the old chips and popping the new ones in.

To show the benefit of increased memory, we ran PCMark 07, a leading synthetic benchmark, on an Intel 3rd Generation Core i7 CPU, with both 4GB and 8GB of RAM installed. With 8GB installed, the benchmark returned a score of 3,398, about 9 percent higher than the mark or 3,121 it provided with 4GB on board.

We also tried configuring 4 out of the 8GB as a RAM disk, using DataRAM's free RAMDisk software. With some of our favorite programs installed on the RAM disk, we were able to cut open times in half from what they were on a 7,200 rpm hard drive and reduce them even further when we paired the RAM Disk with an SSD.

3. Get an external monitor (\$80 to \$100)

You can never be too rich, too thin or have too many pixels on your desktop. If you're just relying on your laptop's single screen, you're slowing yourself down, because you can't fit enough windows on the screen at once.

Just imagine this situation. You're working on a PowerPoint presentation in one window while using data from an Excel sheet that's in another window, looking up some facts on the Web in your browser and keeping track of your email in a fourth window. Every time you switch windows either by hitting ALT+tab or by navigating to the task bar, you're wasting a good 2 seconds and taxing your short-term human memory because you have to remember the contents of a window that's now covered over.

With an external monitor attached, you can add a whole second desktop, which can either show one full screen window or two half windows that are docked next to each other. These days, you can get an 18.5- or 20-inch monitor today for \$80 to \$100. A quick survey of online retail sites shows several 20-inch, 1600 x 900 monitors priced at just under \$100 and 18.5-inchers with 1366 x 768 resolutions starting as low as \$80. If you're willing to splurge, you can find a 1080p, 22- or 23-inch monitor for well under \$150.

If you want a monitor you can take with you on the road, you can find a portable, USB-powered monitor such as the 15.6-inch AOC e1649Fwu for under \$100. However, we prefer the lighter, more portable, but more expensive \$174 Lenovo ThinkVision LT1421.

4. Step up to 802.11n Wi-Fi (\$10 to \$20)

If your notebook is more than three years old, it may have an older 802.11g wireless radio, which is significantly slower and less reliable than the current 802.11n standard. With 802.11n, you move from a theoretical maximum of just 54 Mbps to 150 or 300 Mbps, depending on your router and radio.

While the stepping up from 54 to 150 Mbps probably won't improve Web page loads, it will enable you to transfer files a lot faster within your home or office network. That means better streaming from your media center, better backups to connected storage drives and faster copying of photos to and from your family members' PCs. If you have an extremely fast fiber optic broadband plan such as Verizon's 300 Mbps FIOS Quantum, you'll see a boost in video streaming and file downloads. No matter what you're doing, you'll also see an increase in range, making it easier to get a

strong signal when you're further away from the router.

The good news is that you can get an 802.11n Wi-Fi dongle that plugs into one of your USB ports for under \$20. For just \$10, Rosewill's \$9.99 RNX-MiniN1 802.11n dongle offers speeds up to 150 Mbps and is so tiny that it looks like one of those nano receivers that come with some wireless mice. The \$16.99 Rosewill RNX-MiniN2 sticks out a little bit more, but offers up to 300 Mbps and is still short enough to stay attached to your notebook when you stick it in your bag. If you don't already have an 802.11n router at home, you can purchase one for as little as \$25 for a 150 Mbps unit or under \$50 for a 300 Mbps model.

To see just how much additional throughput you get from upgrading to 802.11n, we used the Netperf benchmark to test an old Dell Latitude D630 laptop with its native 802.11g Wi-Fi, and then with the Rosewill RNX-MiniN1 and the faster Rosewill RNX-MiniN2. Though our results on the small file transfer were well below what's theoretically possible even with 802.11g, there was a clear difference in performance between the three adapters.

5. Get an external battery (\$70)

If your notebook provides over 12 hours of endurance, perhaps you can live without more battery life. Whether you're sitting on an airplane or lying on the couch, you don't want to have to worry about finding and tethering yourself to an outlet.

Unfortunately, in LAPTOP's tests, the average mainstream notebook provides just five and a half hours of endurance at 40 percent brightness. Even worse, more and more new systems come with sealed batteries you can't replace, so forget about buying an extended unit or carrying a spare.

However, for around \$70, you can purchase an external notebook battery such as the \$69 Veho Pebble Pro. I've been using the Pebble Pro for a couple of months now and found that the 13,200 mAH battery provides another several hours of charge to my notebook while, at just 14 ounces, barely adding any weight to my bag. Because the battery comes with 10 different connectors, it works with nearly any brand of PC notebook on the market and is able to charge a phone or tablet at the same time.

Mac users can opt for pricier Hyperjuice Mini external battery, which retails for \$169.

Judge Fines Man in Facebook Case

THE RULING: A federal judge again ordered the release of a letter that Facebook says can help prove that a man's lawsuit claiming half ownership of the multibillion-dollar company is a fraud.

THE FINES: The judge also fined the man and his attorney for not giving the letter to Facebook's lawyers when told to twice before.

THE LETTER: Facebook says the letter from the Kasowitz, Benson, Torres & Friedman law firm informs two other law firms that once represented the man, Paul Ceglia, that it is withdrawing from the case based on a finding that the contract is a fake.

2012 Conventions Embrace Social Media Openness

Democrats and Republicans are using social media to turn their national conventions away from the smoke-filled rooms of yore and into meetings where anyone who wants to get involved is just a click away, no matter where they are.

Both parties' ambitious plans reflect the maturation of social media sites that played a much smaller role in the conventions four years ago. The Republicans call theirs a "convention without walls," while the Democrats say their gathering will be "the most open and accessible in history."

Democrats will not just show prime-time speeches live on the Internet, but will also stream caucus meetings and the council discussions of the party's platform and ideals over the Web. Republicans have hired a full-time blogger and a full-time digital communications manager to do nothing but engage people online.

The conventions' Facebook and Twitter sites are already stoking interest in the events, with photos of the Republican stage under construction in Tampa or profiles of Democratic volunteers and delegates. Users can interact with a mouse click, such as one who urged friends to help the GOP convention Twitter feed muster more followers than its counterpart. Both had more than 10,000 followers Friday.

Social media was still in its infancy four years ago. The number of items posted on Twitter on Election Day 2008 is equal to about six minutes worth of tweets today, the social media company recently wrote on its blog.

The dramatic changes in social media have required both parties to almost start from scratch in developing strategies for incorporating Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Flickr into their conventions.

In 2008, Republicans hired a web vendor to handle all things Internet for their convention. Now, there's a dedicated social media team with its own "Social Media War Room" in the Tampa Convention Center. The party's biggest push through the Internet will come through videos on YouTube, Republican National Convention spokesman James Davis said.

"Our goal is to leverage these technologies, to reach every American, whether they are in Toledo, Ohio, the convention floor in Tampa or a forward operating base in Afghanistan," he said.

Democrats will have a similar setup at their convention Sept. 4-6 in Charlotte. (Republicans meet a week earlier in Tampa.)

"We're able to expand it even further and invite the whole country to participate in a more interactive way than you might traditionally experience by tuning into a television," said Nikki Sutton, director of digital media for the 2012 Democratic Convention.

And those planning protests are using the Internet to get organized, too. The March on Wall Street South, which plans to bring thousands to Charlotte to rally against big business and economic inequality, has a website, Facebook page and Twitter account.

Organizers hope to use the Web to direct people to sites in more than a

dozen states where they can take buses to Charlotte to join in the various protests during the week.

Social media is allowing modern-day campaigns and political parties to get their messages out unfiltered. That's especially useful as broadcasters and newspapers have drastically reduced the amount of air time and space they devote to conventions.

Convention organizers will use social media to emphasize themes that might get lost in the traditional media's limited coverage, said Daniel Kreiss, an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill journalism school who authored a book about the use of new media from former presidential candidate Howard Dean to President Barack Obama.

"There's just not a lot of convention coverage that is going to be offered by the major networks, and this becomes a way that individual figures' speeches get publicity," Kreiss said.

Social media is increasingly allowing parties to control their message and spreading those key messages through an online network of "friends" may allow them to create a sense of credibility, Kreiss said. It will be "viewed as more credible and more authentic" than less-personal media coverage.

The candidates' overall campaigns are also ratcheting up efforts to reach voters online. A report released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center found that President Barack Obama's campaign was more active than Republican Mitt Romney's on the digital front.

The group's Project for Excellent in Journalism analyzed both campaigns' efforts between June 4-17 and found Obama's team posted almost four times as much content during the period and maintained an active presence on almost twice as many platforms. But Romney's campaign said his Facebook page has more people who share or comment on his posts.

Of course, the only metric that matters will be votes in November, and both campaigns and their parties think social media will be critical to get their voters excited enough to go to the polls.

Democrats have already released a smartphone app that provides one place for videos, blog posts and photos. The app also includes an interactive map to help visitors to Charlotte find convention locations or restaurants.

Their convention Facebook site has been running posts spotlighting different delegates and volunteers from across the country for months. Its Flickr page included more than 150 photos from people who printed out a special "I'm There" logo and had their pictures made with it, promising to either be in Charlotte or to follow the convention online. One person holding up his sign on the site is Vice President Joe Biden.

On the GOP convention's Facebook page, a posting showed a picture of lighting rigs inside the Tampa Bay Times Forum and said: "The lights are on and we only have 17 more days to go! Are you ready to nominate the next President of the United States?? The entry had more than 360 "likes" and 400 comments on Wednesday afternoon.

The Democrats used Twitter to invite more than a dozen followers on a tour in July. They got to see Time-Warner Arena, where most of the convention is taking place the first week in September, and the city's football

stadium, where Obama will give his acceptance speech.

For Rashon Carraway, the tour was a dream come true. He sells men's clothes online, but the political science major in college hasn't forgotten his first love.

"This was a great opportunity for me to get an up close and personal look at something I am passionate about, and I have always wanted to do," said Carraway.

He plans to attend as many convention events as he can using his cellphone to make online posts.

And it's just not the parties and protesters who have an interactive strategy.

Donna Chen, the director of marketing and communications for the Tampa Downtown Partnership said more than 15 tourism and convention groups are setting up their own "Social Media Command Center" for the convention.

Tampa Bay and Co., the area's tourism and marketing agency, is coordinating the effort. They'll use the hashtag "TampaBay" to curate the posts.

Chen said about 50 local experts will monitor and interact with people online. They will staff the center and answer questions about the area from people in town for the convention for instance, "where's a good Italian restaurant?" or "What's the closest beach to downtown Tampa?"

Twitter Co-founders Create Online Publishing Site

A website launched by Twitter co-founders as a publishing platform for stories, memories and news was open Wednesday to members of the hit one-to-many text messaging service.

A preview version of Medium.com, launched by Biz Stone and Evan Williams, was live with collections such as "This Happened to Me" stories and "When I Was a Kid" pictures.

"We're rethinking publishing and building a new platform from scratch," Williams said in a message on the site.

"Lots of services have successfully lowered the bar for sharing information, but there's been less progress toward raising the quality of what's produced."

"While it's great that you can be a one-person media company, it'd be even better if there were more ways you could work with others."

Stone and Williams are building the platform through their Obvious Corporation, an enterprise named for the notion that many great ideas seem "obvious" in retrospect.

"We believe publishing, and media much more broadly, is important... It's easy to forget this given how much pointless and destructive media is in the world," Williams said.

"But there's also more great stuff than ever before - and we haven't even

scratched the surface of what our smart devices and our networks that connect most of the planet might enable."

Reading Medium posts was open to anyone with a Twitter account, but posting was initially limited to an invitation-only group that Williams promised would expand rapidly to include those who register.

Google: An Update to Our Search Algorithms

We aim to provide a great experience for our users and have developed over 200 signals to ensure our search algorithms deliver the best possible results. Starting next week, we will begin taking into account a new signal in our rankings: the number of valid copyright removal notices we receive for any given site. Sites with high numbers of removal notices may appear lower in our results. This ranking change should help users find legitimate, quality sources of content more easily whether it's a song previewed on NPR's music website, a TV show on Hulu or new music streamed from Spotify.

Since we re-booted our copyright removals over two years ago, we've been given much more data by copyright owners about infringing content online. In fact, we're now receiving and processing more copyright removal notices every day than we did in all of 2009 more than 4.3 million URLs in the last 30 days alone. We will now be using this data as a signal in our search rankings.

Only copyright holders know if something is authorized, and only courts can decide if a copyright has been infringed; Google cannot determine whether a particular webpage does or does not violate copyright law. So while this new signal will influence the ranking of some search results, we won't be removing any pages from search results unless we receive a valid copyright removal notice from the rights owner. And we'll continue to provide "counter-notice" tools so that those who believe their content has been wrongly removed can get it reinstated. We'll also continue to be transparent about copyright removals.

Facebook Falls to Half of Public Offering Price

Facebook's stock fell to \$19 for the first time on Friday, losing half its market value since the company's initial public offering in May.

The stock dipped 87 cents, or 4 percent, to briefly hit \$19, just minutes before it closed the trading day at \$19.05. Facebook's shares ended the week down nearly 13 percent.

Facebook hit the \$19 milestone a day after the expiration of a lock-up period that had previously prevented some early investors and insiders from selling their shares. Stakeholders who owned a combined 271 million Facebook shares before Thursday can now sell their holdings.

A breakdown of just how many major Facebook Inc. shareholders sold their stock this week won't be available until next week at the earliest, when sellers must disclose such transactions.

Facebook's stock has struggled since the company's mid-May IPO. It closed its first day of trading barely above its initial offering price of \$38. It has been below that level since.

The stock has been down on 38 trading days, up on 25 days and unchanged on one since its initial public offering.

Investors have been concerned about the social network's ability to increase revenue and make money from its growing mobile audience. Many analysts, however, hold positive opinions of the company's long-term prospects.

Former Hacker: Today's Hacks Are All About the Money

Hackers have changed since the days of The Matrix. While most hackers used to hold iconoclastic ideals, with aspirations to "shock the system" for a perceived common good, today's hacker/cracker community is more concerned with making a quick buck.

At least that's how Mike Calce, the former hacker known as 'mafiaboy,' sees things. Calce says he still has contact with some of the people he used to know in the hacker community, and while many of them are still active, their priorities have changed.

"The hacker motivation has changed immensely," Calce told Mashable in an interview. "It's much more about monetary gain, whereas in my era, it was about pushing the status quo."

Calce's era was circa 2000, when he pulled off major denial-of-service attacks on several major tech companies, including Amazon, Dell, Yahoo, eBay and CNN - all when he was 15 years old. Calce was eventually caught and arrested for the attacks, serving eight months in a "group facility," he says.

After doing his time, Calce laid low for years, but now he works as a digital security consultant and keynotes at IT conferences. He wrote a book about his experiences in 2008, Mafiaboy: How I Cracked the Internet and Why It's Still Broken.

I asked Calce what he thought motivated hackers such as the ones that infamously hacked Wired writer Mat Honan, who claimed they wanted to get access to his three-character Twitter handle. Calce couldn't see a clear financial reason for that particular hack, but he said that's often the case.

"There's a lot of reasons people hack Twitter accounts," he said. "Some are into skewing data to their advantage. A lot of hacks don't even look like there is monetary gain involved, but normally that's the ulterior motive."

With the shift from mischief-making to financial motives, the risk has shifted as well. Whereas 10 years ago hacking was more of a danger to large companies with big online operations, the risk today to individuals is much greater, Calce says.

He cautions individuals to take basic security precautions like setting up a two-way firewall on their computers, turning Bluetooth off (on phones and PCs) when not using the feature and keeping a close eye on what sort

of data and information they put online. Password managers are a good idea, too, since Calce says hackers still use "brute force" techniques, which often work on weak passwords.

However, in Honan's case he was using a password manager, and hackers instead slipped through the holes in various companies' security procedures, resetting passwords to accounts over the phone by calling their tech-support departments. Calce says many companies - especially big ones - don't invest nearly enough money in security.

"Sometimes if you don't find a way in electronically, you find a hole through a human being," he says. "[Companies] don't budget enough for security. The IT department is often in charge, and they might not be looking at the how the company handles phone calls or the screening process for personnel."

Predictably, Calce suggests companies contract third-party security consultants to find the holes in their security, but it's tough to disagree with him. It took a high-profile hack like Honan's to prompt Apple and Amazon to re-examine their security procedures.

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