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Tekst 9

MARKETPLACE

Wanted: your PC's spare time

Data research runs on combined power of unused computers

By Lee Gomes

Not to put any pressure on you, but the choice is entirely yours: When your computer isn't busy, you can use it to run a screen saver showing toasters flying through the air. Or, you can help make the world a better place.

You would do the latter by taking part, with your computer, in research that uses "distributed computing." These are scientific projects that use the Web to tap the combined computing power of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of PCs in homes and offices all around the world.
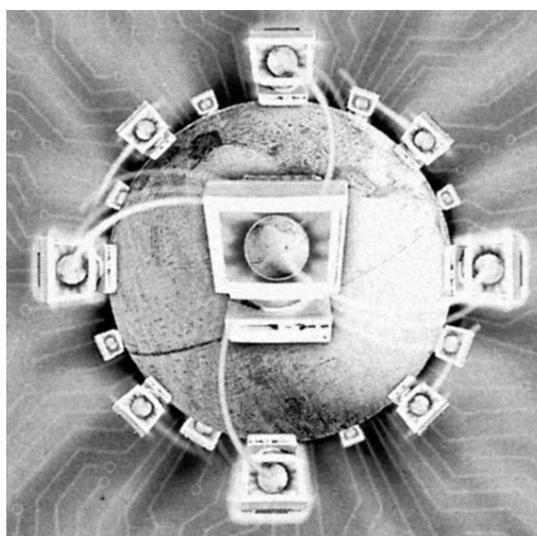
In distributed computing, a big computing problem is broken down into smaller pieces, which are then farmed out to participating machines. Those machines periodically report their results back to the project's central computer, and then download a new job when they are ready for it. This enables researchers to work their way through data much faster than they could otherwise.

The first, and most famous, example of distributed computing is SETI@home, which lets PCs take part in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence by helping to analyze signals picked up by radio telescopes.

There are now scores of distributed-computing projects in a number of disciplines. You can help look for a cure for Alzheimer's disease, predict climate change or find new numbers. New projects are coming online every day.

Software that lets you take part in this work is available free from a number of sites. Downloading and installing it is usually quick and simple. Once the program is running, you configure it to your liking: You can set it up so that the research project takes over when the computer has been idle for a set number of minutes, or you can have your PC work on research full-time while you go about your own computer tasks.

One important clearinghouse for people interested in distributed computing is the Boinc Web site, the brainchild of David P. Anderson, a researcher at the

Space Sciences Laboratory of the University of California, Berkeley. (Boinc is an acronym for the Berkeley Open Infrastructure for Network Computing. The Web address is Boinc.Berkeley.edu.)

Besides giving you a link to download the Boinc software, the Boinc site shows a list of some of the research with which you can help out. Einstein@home, for instance, is run by Bruce Allen, a physicist at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It scans through data from several Earth-based observatories to look for the cosmic "gravitational waves" that were predicted by Einstein's General Theory of Relativity.

Most, but not all, distributed-computing projects use Boinc soft-ware. One that doesn't is Folding@home, run out of Stanford University. (www.Folding.Stanford.edu.) The project, says Vijay Pande, a professor in Stanford's chemistry department, looks at proteins that are implicated in Alzheimer's and Huntington's disease. "Folding" is a reference to the way proteins fold themselves into various shapes.

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Lees bij de volgende opgave eerst de vraag voordat je de bijbehorende tekst raadpleegt.

Tekst 9 Wanted: your PC's spare time

"Not to … better place." (eerste alinea)
Je wilt wel meewerken aan een project zoals beschreven in de eerste alinea, maar je weet nog niet precies aan welk.

1p **41** Staat in de tekst een website waar je het beste informatie kunt opzoeken? Zo nee, antwoord "Nee". Zo ja, noteer de naam van deze website.