

UnderstandIT

From **MAY DAY CONSULTING LIMITED** in association with **Facilitators International LLP**

A publication designed to inform and enable businesses to understand the implications, costs and advantages of using Information and Communications Technology. Distributed through Chambers of Commerce.

WELCOME TO A NEW YEAR – WITH AN APOLOGY

Welcome to another year and the latest edition of Understand IT. We apologise for the non-appearance of the December 2006 edition which was due to a technical hitch. We are therefore publishing two editions this month to compensate, and hope that you will find them informative and relevant.

We appreciate all the feedback – both positive and negative and welcome your comments and suggestions on topics that you would like us to cover in future editions.

REMOTE ACCESS TO YOUR OFFICE OR HOME COMPUTER (PART TWO)

In the November edition, we discussed a fairly technical issue of trying to connect remotely to your office or home computer.. A couple of our readers have expressed a little confusion over the subject, so this month, we will try to dispel some of the confusion and expand on some of the concepts surrounding remote access.

In the previous article, we talked a little about using remote access in a technical support role by using the feature called Remote Desktop built into Windows. This facility was not really designed for those who might want to access information that resides on their home or office computer/network whilst they are away from home.

The Remote Access feature that most of us will want to use involves that ability to connect to your home or office computer, or network file server in order to run an application, access information that you need, or download a file whilst you are away from your base.

These needs can all be satisfied by using one of the third-party applications that we detailed in the original article – these typically provide not only a way of accessing information residing on a remote computer, but also encryption to ensure that your information is protected. This is particularly important and attractive if you are using a public wireless “hotspot” to communicate on the Internet.

If you are having difficulties getting to grips with remote access and feel that it would be of benefit to you or your organisation, then don't hesitate to call May Day Consulting for high-level FREE advice and an assessment of your needs.

IP ADDRESSING – WHAT IS IT?

The discussion about firewalls and IP address allocation etc. in the last edition may have been a little “techy”. Although we have provided a “jargon-busting” explanation on IP addressing in past articles, it is important to understand the basic concepts of Internet addressing.

You can regard an IP address in the same way as a telephone number – simply a way of identifying your computer to others on the Internet. There are two types of IP address – internal and public. An IP address consists of 4 sets of up to 4 digits, separated by a dot e.g. 192.168.1.1.

The difference between a telephone number and an IP address is that often your Internet Service Provider will not allocate a fixed public IP address to your connection since it consumes what is a finite number of addresses for which they have to pay. Instead, when you connect to the ISP, their server will “dynamically” allocate an address from the range of IP addresses at their disposal and this will be your address for the duration of your connection, after which it can be allocated to another user.

In the same way, your own private Local Area Network (LAN) will usually do the same, although the addresses it uses will be “internal” and not public IP addresses. Normally, the only “public” address your LAN will usually have is the one allocated by your ISP to the connection that your network has to the Internet.

The computers on your private network will therefore not be visible to public users of the Internet (although hackers have means of gaining access to LANs and doing just that – this is where Firewalls are typically used to provide a level of protection).

In the context of using remote access to your home computer or network, it is critical that you know the IP address of your home computer to be able to establish a connection. If a new address is allocated dynamically, it can present problems in making that remote access connection.

There are technical ways of circumventing these problems that are probably a little too “techy” to cover here. If you therefore need assistance in gaining a deeper understanding of IP addressing, or more likely would prefer someone to take care of the detailed technical solution for you, then please call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457 and May Day Consulting will come to your rescue!

MOBILE ROAMING CHARGES TO REDUCE OR DISAPPEAR?

That heading may have got your attention if you travel overseas often and use your usual mobile phone to “roam”, and received a shock when you return home and the next mobile phone invoice arrives!

Most mobile telephone network operators have, for some time, been under pressure from consumers and governments across Europe to justify and reduce the charges they levy for using your mobile phone whilst in another country.

So far, the operators have not responded to these calls, despite threats from governments and regulatory authorities to take further action. The problem for the industry is simple: it makes too much money from users who do use the roaming features of their networks.

At the moment, if you use your mobile phone abroad, you will usually pay the cost of the call, which would be routed via the local network operator in the country you are in, plus a surcharge levied by your home country network operator. In addition, you will pay your home network operator for every call that you receive (part of this cost will go to the operator in the country you are travelling in). Add all these costs together, and you will be paying a significant premium for “roaming”.

However, maybe, just maybe, there is light at the end of the tunnel. One, albeit small, operator – 3 – has recently decided to abolish roaming charges completely. They have announced that making a call from one of the seven countries in which they operate will cost no more than if the call were made from home. The reason is that it has decided to incorporate Voice Over IP (VoIP) technology into its network, thereby significantly reducing its network operating costs.

VoIP technology, as many of you will know, converts your analogue conversation into digital information and passes it over the Internet along with all other bits and bytes. It can therefore use existing Internet broadband links to route telephone calls, rather than the conventional phone network, avoiding the need to pay telephone network operators for time spent on a specific call.

VoIP is now being used extensively by the conventional telephone companies for similar benefits of cost reduction. So far, no mobile phone operator uses VoIP in the same way. This is partly because there are sometimes technical difficulties with quality of transmission when connecting VoIP calls and the cellular radio networks.

3, which is part of the Hutchison Whampoa organisation has 3.75 million customers in the UK and over 13 million world-wide. The new service is called “3- Like Home”, and you can find out more here:

http://www.three.co.uk/personal/coverage/_going_abroad/_like_home_details.omp

In addition, unlike all other operators, 3 will NOT charge for **receiving** calls whilst you are travelling – a major area for roaming customer dissatisfaction.

The slight down-side is that currently 3 is only able to offer this facility on 3’s own networks, which are currently in Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Australia and of course Hong Kong. The list will inevitably be extended in due course.

The point is, though, this move is a small dent in the uniform façade being presented by the mobile network operators. Despite their protestations about government and regulatory pressure; in time, either through government intervention or market forces, roaming costs will come down significantly.

FIREFOX CONTINUES TO GAIN GROUND IN BROWSER WAR

We have covered the “war” between Microsoft’s Internet Explorer and other Internet browsing software in the past. Mozilla’s FireFox is one that continues to go from strength to strength – all despite the recent launch of Microsoft’s Internet Explorer version 7 a few months ago.

The Mozilla foundation, that produces the open source browser (Open Source just means that the source code is made available to third parties to provide add-on facilities and enhancements), has now claimed that its target for penetration of the browser market has now reached a staggering 23%. This compares with around 2-3% a few months after its original launch. This gain is almost entirely at the expense of Internet Explorer.

Mozilla are now forging ahead with the testing of a brand new version 3, code-named “Gran Paradiso”. It is scheduled for launch in late 2007, and Mozilla claims that it is being “built for speed”, with lightning rendering of web pages, particularly those containing multimedia elements like video and sound.

The current version of Firefox is version 2.0.0.1 and it can be downloaded for free from here:

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>

If you are tired of the continuing plague of security loopholes in Internet Explorer, then give FireFox a try.

We wish to acknowledge with thanks that some of the material contained within this publication has been sourced from Computer Weekly, PC Pro, BBC and other reputable sources..

May Day Consulting Limited and your Chamber of Commerce have endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication, but do not accept liability for any inaccuracy or omission contained within it.

Information on other Business and IT services can be found on our web site at: <http://www.maydayconsulting.co.uk> or by calling Alan Finch on 07968 262079.

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