

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.

SMART TAGS

For the uninitiated, a “Smart Tag” is otherwise known as a Radio Frequency ID (RFID). You may have seen references to them elsewhere and wondered what this new jargon was all about. Basically the RFID device is a very small “tag” that is often inserted in goods on sale in supermarkets and other retail outlets.

The use of these “Smart Tags” has been growing over the past couple of years, and the applications to which they are being put is also expanding, as is the capability of what was originally a passive piece of technology.

The tags use short range radio to enable them to be identified by radio transponders located within a warehouse, office or any location. They can be used in a number of ways – for example in its most simple application, to identify the item, perhaps its price, and its location etc. This application is now used extensively by supermarket chains, like Tesco – it enables them to keep track of large volumes of goods within their warehouses and distribution network, etc.

Another, probably familiar application is to alert security personnel when goods are removed from stores without being paid for! These are some of the more mundane applications.

Some airlines are now testing the use of RFIDs to keep track of baggage, not only within the departing airport area, but throughout its journey. Losing items of baggage may therefore soon be a thing of the past – even if it has been sent to the wrong destination, at least the airline will know immediately where it is!

Researchers and developers are now investigating ways of enhancing these tags by adding more intelligence and the ability to communicate using short range radio (WiFi and Bluetooth) and the ability to inter-connect them into networks.

One innovative use that is currently under test and evaluation is the use of intelligent RFIDs to monitor construction workers when using heavy equipment. Prototype tags are capable of measuring vibration and warning when the maximum permitted amount of time has been exceeded for using such equipment.

Prolonged use of vibrating equipment, like heavy-duty drills etc. can seriously injure a worker. In this way, the worker’s health and safety is being protected, and the employer is able to ensure compliance with any relevant regulations about use of such equipment to avoid injury.

IT equipment manufacturers are also testing their use when integrated into their own products to monitor their use and warn the user, or even the manufacturer directly when the equipment needs servicing, has a fault or is maybe about to fail.

Researchers estimate that an average household has a very large number of items that could benefit from the application of RFID technology. It has been said that the future of the Internet is likely to be one of an Internet of connected devices.

If you believe that your business would benefit from the use of this type of asset tracking device, then contact Alan Finch at May Day Consulting on (01224) 697457 for advice on developing a business case and implementing this type of technology.

THREATS FROM SOCIAL NETWORKING

The number of Internet web sites that provide social networking facilities is growing exponentially every year. The giants in this field are MySpace, Facebook and Bebo which are aimed at non-business social networkers. There are others like LinkedIn and Plaxo that are aimed more at business communities.

However, the one thing that these sites/services have in common, similar to almost any other activity undertaken on the Internet is that they pose a potential risk to organisations generally, but more specifically to their integrity, public reputation, business continuity and sometimes to the very survival of their businesses.

These threats, as you might imagine can come in the form of viruses, Trojans, denial-of-service attacks, “phishing” and more recently “vishing”, to name a few. Social networking sites are now more often being used to propagate these threats among users.

For the uninitiated, “phishing” is the term used to describe the attempts by fraudsters to send spam emails, purporting to come from a reputable organisation (typically a well-known bank), and by using alarmist language to persuade the recipient to click a link provided in the message which takes the user to a web site that looks and feels exactly like the real thing. The user is then tricked into typing in the user ID and password and other confidential information to the fraudulent site, with obvious consequences.

“Vishing” is a similar technique used to persuade unsuspecting users to part with personal IDs, passwords and other security information.

In this case, it uses the increasing popularity of using Voice Over IP (VOIP) technology where you can make Internet-based voice calls to almost anywhere in the world, often for free, or at an extremely low nominal charge.

Scammers are now using automated techniques for identifying VOIP users or stolen lists of VOIP phone numbers, and by using voice processing systems and text to speech conversation technology, will make a call to the unsuspecting user. An automated response then advises the user that his/her bank account has been compromised and directs them to call a specific number. On calling this number, which is often a premium rate number, the user is prompted to enter security information via the telephone keypad. The user's bank account is then open for plundering.

Some may believe that relating these activities is alarmist, and might suggest that it is unnecessary scare-mongering. We would argue that these threats are real, and should not be ignored, but recognised, be fully understood, and handled effectively, without allowing the business to be intimidated.

For each and every threat that is currently aimed at users of the Internet, there is a solution. The trick is to be aware of the threat and have the knowledge and expertise at hand to deal with that threat. We hope that this is not beginning to sound like open warfare, but the recognition of and implementation of best practices in business is key to the effective harnessing of technology in its many forms to develop your business.

Returning to the subject of social networking sites, it is also necessary to recognise that employees should be presented with clear policies and guidelines on what is and what is not permitted, when using the business network. Providing that clear, sensible guidelines are provided, together with the most appropriate software and hardware monitoring tools are in place, then any threat can usually be successfully neutralised.

Computer Weekly, a reputable industry publication recently published an article on social networking and a link to MessageLabs, a leader in the field of protection from these threats. A guide entitled "7-Steps to Controlling Social Networking Use in Your Business" is available. It can be downloaded for free from:

<http://www.messagelabs.co.uk/resources/whitepapers>

If you feel that your organisation is vulnerable through use of social networking sites by your employees, then you are encouraged to seek professional guidance on the most appropriate methods of protecting your business. Call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457 for a discussion without any commitment.

REVIEWING AND TRACKING DOCUMENT CHANGES IN MS WORD

This is quite a complex area of Microsoft's Word, but if you are in an environment where multiple users are working on a large, complex document, then the ability to track changes to a document, and who actually made those changes, is a very valuable facility.

Firstly, in order to track changes in a document, you need to make sure that the facility is switched on. This is done by selecting TRACK CHANGES from the TOOLS menu. Notice that this will place "TRK" in the status bar at the bottom of the screen and automatically add the REVIEWING toolbar to the other toolbars at the top of the screen. From this point on, any changes that you, or any other contributor makes to the document, will be marked in accordance with the settings contained on the TRACK CHANGES tab under TOOLS/OPTIONS. The default settings can be changed as you wish. By default, the following changes are tracked and displayed using a different colour for each contributor:

- Text inserted will be underlined
- Deleted text will be struck-through with a horizontal bar
- Formatting changes – these will be indicated by a change in the colour of the re-formatted text.

Other change (otherwise known as Markup) tools are provided, for making Comments (which are shown in the form of a balloon in the right hand margin), or highlighting (colouring text in any colour) perhaps to emphasise a point.

The changes made to a document are always stored with the document, and the display of all or some of the changes can be turned on and off at will by using the SHOW button on the REVIEWING TOOLBAR.

Similarly, you can opt to print (or not to print) the full document showing all tracked changes, or even just a list of the changes themselves.

Finally, the original author can review a document that has been amended by any number of contributors and can selectively look at the amendments made by each and accept or reject each individual change.

The above outline really only has space to provide a high-level overview of this very useful facility. We would recommend that you obtain any one of a number of books published on Microsoft Word or call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457 for further assistance if you are having problems using the Tracking Facilities within MS Word.

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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