

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.

"DIGITAL BRITAIN" – INTERIM REPORT PUBLISHED

There has been some industry criticism; even cynicism, following the release of an interim report prepared by a combined task force from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). The head of the task force is Lord Carter.

The criticism of the "Digital Britain" report is principally, that the team have been working in relative isolation, even though some external industry representatives have been involved. Some of the report's recommendations are felt to be naïve and uninformed, demonstrating a lack of understanding of some of the current technological issues.

It has been suggested that this display of naivety has been deliberate – causing controversy in an attempt to engage others, including the public to contribute to the final report, which is due out later in the year.

However, the failure to involve others may perhaps be due to the lack of publicity and inaccessibility to the task force. The links in the report and references to the web site have not been widely disseminated and are buried deep within the interim report.

Examples of the claimed naivety include the 2Mb "broadband-for-all" objective, which is felt to be considerably inferior to what is being proposed in other countries. Similarly, the plans to deal with the protection of intellectual property – piracy and "illegal" downloading of information are said to be inadequate and do not appear to recognise the realities in this area.

You can download a copy of the full Digital Britain interim report, or specific sections from the web site of the Department for Culture Media and Sport here:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/broadcasting/5631.aspx

MICROSOFT "FIX-IT" AUTOMATICALLY

Microsoft has recently started placing a "Fix-it" icon on some of the web pages on their support web site. By clicking on the icon (see below), a small program is downloaded which carries out the necessary steps to fix the problem described on the web page.



Microsoft has said that the facility is already available on around 100 of their support pages and they plan to extend the automatic fix facility to many more situations faced by users of Microsoft software. It will most likely only address the relatively simple problems faced by users but could be a useful feature for those of us who are not so IT literate.

There is naturally some concern about allowing Microsoft to download, install and execute a program to fix a reported problem, but the facility is not mandatory and a user can still follow the instructions detailed on the relevant support page and implement the fix manually.

PC OR MOBILE PHONE?

Once again, advances in technology are beginning to blur the "conventional" view of the primary functions of some devices.

For example, for some time, many mobile phones have been competing with the MP3 player or Ipod music and video players.

Similarly, notebook PC's are shrinking, but continuing to provide all the power and functionality of much larger desktop or laptop systems. At the same time, the mobile phone, whilst not getting physically much larger, is now beginning to incorporate an increasing array of functions that rival those on a PC.

The latest mobile phone models from some of the major manufacturers are capable of running a range of software that includes for example, stripped-down versions of office productivity software. Documents, spreadsheets, presentations and other files can now be easily shared between your PC and mobile phone.

The recent Mobile World Congress in Barcelona saw announcements by many players in the mobile software development sector relating to the development and integration of a large number of software applications across different mobile operating system platforms

It is estimated that the range of software applications being produced for the mobile phone will develop significantly over the next 2 years.

Apart from business applications, other mobile phone innovations currently being developed include the ability to control home media devices (DVD, TV etc) and one manufacturer is now able to project movies onto a wall screen!

WINDOWS ADMINISTRATOR RIGHTS

There has, for some time, been a growing apprehension about the number of vulnerabilities discovered in Windows and being exploited by unscrupulous fraudsters or just the malicious minded.

This, and the "awarding" of administrator status to users who are not (and need not be) particularly IT literate, has caused those users considerable concern that this responsibility is too onerous.

We therefore thought it would be useful to spend a little time on explaining the reasons for having an administrator and the responsibilities that being an administrator might place on the title-holder.

Firstly, an administrator is one who has complete control over the Windows operating system and can do almost anything that he or she wishes. At the simplest level, this can be the creation (and deletion) of user accounts. A user account is simply the credentials assigned to one person giving them access to the system by entering the required user ID and password (assuming that one has been set up and applied to the account).

Every Windows workstation or PC will have had an administrator account automatically created when the operating system was first installed. For practical purposes, this is usually the individual who installed the operating system and the user account created at the time of installation is by default given administrative privileges.

From that point on, only the administrator or another user who has been given administrator privileges can create new user accounts and make other, complex changes to the configuration of the operating system. Such changes would typically include the installation of new software, or upgrading existing software applications.

Unfortunately, many administrators do not use best practice when setting up new users, and often simply give each new user account administrative privileges without a second thought as to whether the user in question has the knowledge to act as administrator or indeed the need for these privileges. Often all users on a given system are administrators.

Prior to Windows Vista, anyone with administrative privileges was able to carry out these changes with impunity, and was therefore able to potentially create havoc if they were not aware of what they were doing.

Windows Vista introduced a feature called User Account Control (UAC), which by default is enabled when Vista is first installed, but can be disabled if the administrator so wishes.

The purpose of this facility is to provide a back-stop when potentially dangerous actions are carried out – even by the administrator.

When this feature is enabled, Windows intercepts any actions that could potentially cause problems or even potential damage to the system. It then asks for confirmation as to whether to proceed or not. If the user logged on is not an administrator or does not have admin privileges, then the action will not be permitted.

Given that so many systems have multiple users with administrative rights should be worrying, when it is not necessary. The unwary user with such rights could be tricked into downloading and installing updates to existing applications that are perhaps not what they appear. Potentially these actions can make systems vulnerable to attack from any number of directions.

The business manager who has responsibility for ensuring that the business is protected, should treat seriously the role of the computer system administrator. Appointing the administrator is an important decision that should not be done lightly. The administrator should not be a person who has little or no knowledge of the technology for which he/she is to be given responsibility.

So many applications – including firewalls, anti-virus programs, web browsers, instant messaging clients, office applications and even media player software – not to mention Windows Update itself and the drivers for the various third-party components installed - all now offer online updating facilities. This is designed to ensure that the software running on your system is always totally up to date with the latest version.

However, the unwary user (with administrative rights) might simply accept any and all prompts to download and update such applications without really understanding what is being installed and why. The potential risks are high - perhaps introducing unauthorised intrusion into your computer system (and by extension, maybe the entire office network), but it may also introduce other incompatibilities that might affect the efficient operation of the system.

The key to this question is to ensure that there is only one administrator on any computer system – someone who has some basic knowledge of Windows and the applications currently installed on the system. They can then make informed judgements about software installations and permitting or denying automatic updates of applications, drivers etc. Other users need not be given administrative rights at all.

If you require assistance in helping to define administrative responsibilities, please call Alan Finch on 01224 697457.

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.

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