

# 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.

## **COSTLY BROADBAND SUPPORT**

The consumer organisation "Which" recently published a report that investigated the cost of using the support services provided by 45 Internet Service Providers, Telecommunications suppliers and other technology service organisations.

The principal findings in the report were that the cost for consumers can sometimes be extremely high. Whilst many of the larger service/support organisations (including the likes of BT, O2 and UK Online) use a free 0800 number for customers to use, 32 of the organisations surveyed use higher-cost premium rate numbers (beginning with 090). It found that many customers did not realise the cost of using these premium rate numbers and in some cases, the costs appearing on their telephone bill were often extremely high.

Amongst those who were using premium rate numbers included Tesco Broadband, Supanet and Roxio. When approached, Tesco admitted that the organisation was reviewing the use of such numbers and would be moving to lower-cost numbers – probably local call rates regardless of where the customer might be calling from.

Other organisations claimed that they made no profit from the use of such numbers, with any revenue received going towards defraying the cost of providing user support services. Typically when a caller uses a premium number, then a proportion of the call cost goes to the telecommunications company, with the balance going to the support service company.

The recommendation is to look closely at the support number published by your particular service provider and monitor its use by your organisation to determine if there are cheaper alternatives available.

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## **BEWARE OF FAKE ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE**

The attempts by fraudsters to cash-in on concerns of individuals and businesses about viruses, phishing and other hazards of using the internet would appear to be paying dividends.

There have been organisations peddling anti-virus and other "protection" software applications for some considerable time. Many of these applications do nothing to protect a user's system and can often be harmful, rather than provide the level of protection they claim.

The level of fraudulent activity in this area has recently taken a leap forward by the use of search engines to direct unsuspecting users to web sites offering what has become known as "scareware". Such web sites, once visited immediately display one or more pop up windows warning that your computer is riddled with viruses and other malicious software (malware) and offering to fix problems that it has "found" on your system. The applications are all of a reasonable cost, enticing users to use the prominent download button after payment of this sum.

The somewhat insidious approach taken by these fraudsters now includes using search engines to direct users to "scareware" sites by inserting or "seeding" their own (and other's) sites with some of the most popular search terms. Terms inserted often relate to topical news or issues of the day – terms such as "Obama" or even "Natasha Richardson" (the actress who was tragically killed recently). Use of such popular terms in the code behind their web site often brings these "scareware" sites to the top of any results of a search on Google or Yahoo.

We recommend that you be particularly vigilant and suspicious of any pop-up windows on any web site that claims to have found a virus or spyware on your computer – it is almost certainly a scam! Perhaps you should have pop-up windows blocked!

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## **MODULAR WINDOWS WELCOMED**

As reported in an earlier edition of Understand IT, the next version of Windows (currently known as Windows 7) will be modular in design. In other words, it will provide users with "pick and mix" options in order to create the operating system that more accurately reflects their requirements.

It is now likely that Windows 7 will not come with Internet Explorer, Media Player and Media Centre integrated into the operating system and installed by default. This "unbundling" may include other non-core features that in future can be installed or not at will.

Microsoft's approach to this has been welcomed by the EU Commission who have been monitoring Microsoft's response to various anti-trust rulings.

The EU has recently halted its monitoring actions against Microsoft and feel that their new approach to these issues will be acceptable to all, including competitors who will be able to compete on a level playing field.

## ANOTHER PHORM UPDATE

You might have followed the previous articles in Understand IT relating to the "behavioural advertising" organisation Phorm and its extremely controversial plans to implement their system, aided by a number of large Internet Service Providers, led by BT.

The "service" involves the interception of users' internet communications to identify areas of potential interest to that user. Targeted advertising material is then delivered to that user, based on the "experience" gathered by the Phorm system. This is why it has been dubbed "behavioural advertising".

The concept behind the service has been controversial and subject to strong criticism since initial trials began some time ago, in partnership with BT.

The privacy implications are obvious and the reason why there has been such condemnation of its intent. The Information Commissioner has laid down strict rules under which the service must operate, but there is ongoing discussion about the interpretation of the requirements for users to have a choice.

Phorm recently stated in a committee that "users would always be able to back-out" of the service. This implies that a user will automatically be opted-in to the service, but can then be excluded if he/she chooses. However, the Information Commissioner has made it very clear that a user will have to consciously "opt-in" should they wish to avail themselves of this service – a very different interpretation!

BT has recently also made public comments that could be interpreted as maybe getting cold feet over its involvement in the implementation of this service.

Meantime, The Open Rights Group has sent an open letter to the privacy officers at Microsoft, Yahoo, Google/YouTube, Amazon, Ebay and AOL asking them to opt out of the soon-to-be-launched system. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the "father" of the Internet has also commented that Phorm is "like a TV camera in your room".

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## HOW TO IDENTIFY A SECURE WEB SITE

Most sites involved in online e-commerce or involved in any financial transactions (and this includes all banks and other financial organisations) will use encryption to ensure your security whilst doing business with them.

The question has recently been posed to us – how do you know that you are communicating securely whilst, for example, accessing your bank account?

Well, the answer is to look at the URL (web address) that is displayed in your browser's address box. If it shows `https://` . . . then you can be assured that your communication is being encrypted by the bank and decrypted by your browser before being displayed on your PC. All transactions between you and the site displaying this protocol prefix are therefore secure.

HTTPS is simply an acronym that stands for Hyper Text Transport Protocol over Secure Socket Layer. This sounds very technical (and indeed it is), but it is sufficient to know that encryption is being used for your (and your correspondent organisation's) security.

Conversely, should you be carrying out a financial online transaction, and you do NOT see the HTTPS prefix before the web address with which you are communicating, then beware, because it is not secure.

All banks and financial institutions use this secure protocol to encrypt their web pages. You may often find that the organisation's welcome or home page or pages will not be secure, but as soon as you click on the Log On button or link, then you will be automatically directed to the secure pages and the HTTPS prefix will be indicated in the address.

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## SOME HINTS 7 TIPS – MS EXCEL

For those of our readers who maybe do not use MS Excel frequently, here are just three small tips that might help make your work easier. If you need some training on the use of Excel, then please call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457 for help.

1. If you have a spreadsheet with a large number of entries that are used in a calculation using a function (for example `=C23+C78+C112.....`) then double-click on the cell that contains the result function, and the cells that are used in the result are highlighted in the spreadsheet in different colours. This can help when you are trying to trouble-shoot a worksheet since it shows if any cells are missing in the resulting calculation.
2. When printing a spreadsheet, there are many tools to help you in printing the results of your efforts in the format that you want. For example, it is possible to specify that a spreadsheet that would normally span two pages (across) can be adjusted to fit on to one page wide (however, be sure that the output is legible since this will result in the font being reduced in size to fit the page).
3. When previewing your print, you can adjust the margins visually by selecting MARGINS in the preview window and clicking on each margin and moving it with the mouse.

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..

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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.

### May Day Consulting Ltd

....stress free IT

9 Benbecula Road  
ABERDEEN AB16 1FT  
Tel: (01224) 697457

E-mail: [info@maydayconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@maydayconsulting.co.uk)  
Internet: <http://www.maydayconsulting.co.uk>