

UnderstandIT

From **MAY DAY CONSULTING LIMITED** in association with **FACILITATORS UK**

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.

BE PC LEGAL

Microsoft has begun stepping up its efforts to stamp out the use of pirate software. As part of this campaign, it has circulated a flyer to many UK businesses. The flyer attempts to explain the rules about the licencing of Microsoft Windows.

For example, when you buy a computer with Windows pre-installed, how do you make sure that it has been legally licenced for you to use? Many unscrupulous computer dealers configure the PC equipment that they sell with Microsoft Windows, but do not include any original disk(s) or documentation to confirm that it is an original, legal installation. They will often use one original copy of Windows to install the operating system on multiple computers. This is illegal, and you need to be aware when purchasing a computer system that you are in possession of a legal copy of the operating system and have a bona fide licence to prove it. If you do not, you may have difficulties in updating the software with patches issued by Microsoft, or getting support for your system.

Microsoft has established a web site that explains the somewhat complex rules about licencing of Windows. For more assistance go to:

<http://www.microsoft.com/uk/windows/licensing/default.msp>

or contact Alan Finch on (01224) 697457 for help.

BEATING THE ROGUE DIALERS

British Telecom has recently announced two initiatives designed to help the ongoing issue of "rogue" diallers.

Over recent years, an increasing number of unsuspecting internet users have been duped into downloading small programmes from web sites that take over the dial-up networking feature of the computer.

These programmes enable the user to access particular web sites, ostensibly for free (without the need to provide credit card information for example). However, what the user is often unaware of is that the dial-up networking feature is re-programmed to dial a premium rate number, the cost of which can be very high (and a proportion of the cost of those calls goes to the web site owner). Some unsuspecting users have been faced with telephone bills running into many thousands of pounds.

BT's first initiative is to provide a free piece of software that bars the computer's modem from dialling a number that is NOT on the user's "pre-approved" list of numbers.

The software will be available to download for free in May this year. We will monitor the release date and provide a follow up in a later edition of Understand IT.

The second BT initiative is to extend its existing monitoring and early warning system on telephone usage. BT will in future be able to quickly identify any unusual activity on a user's telephone, including unusually high daily usage, calls to "suspect" numbers, when a text or recorded voice message will be sent automatically to the user's telephone.

ICSTIS (Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services), the UK body responsible for policing the user of premium rate numbers, has welcomed BT's move.

ICSTIS now has to licence all users of premium rate telephone services and has introduced very strict terms and conditions on their use. This follows many incidents of abuse of these services.

The following checklist will help you to distinguish legitimate Telephone Information Service providers from those that are not:

- There should be clear call costs
- On-screen terms and conditions
- Contact details for the company
- Confirmation box showing you agree to download software
- On-screen clock showing running total of costs
- Automatic cut-off if cost reaches £20
- Icon to show dialler is installed.

RSS – WHAT IS IT?

You may have noticed a small orange coloured button with the letters RSS on many web sites, and perhaps wondered what it was.

The RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and it is an easy way for you to keep updated automatically on websites you like.

Instead of you having to go to websites to see if they've written a new article or feature, you can use RSS to get them to tell you every time they have something new.

Firstly, you need to download and install a news-reader – this is a piece of software that is often free (but may incur a cost). It is used to record and monitor the RSS “feeds” or channels in which you are interested, and alert you when new content has been posted.

There are many readers available for Windows, Mac and Linux computer operating systems. Google, the search engine has produced a useful listing, which can be found here:

http://directory.google.com/Top/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Technical_Services/Cataloguing/Metadata/RDF/Applications/RSS/News_Readers/

You then need to subscribe to any RSS feeds or channels in which you are interested and add them to the reader you have selected. You will then be notified when new content is available on the web site/sites you have selected.

GEEK SPEAK EXPLAINED

It is some time since we included any jargon-busting articles in Understand IT, for fear of being repetitious. However, a recent survey by AOL (America OnLine), reported by the BBC, indicated that many computer users do not understand some of the “geek speak” currently being used. The following is therefore just a few of the terms you may come across:

Virus: Malicious program designed to damage data; usually spread via infected e-mail attachments

Trojan: Malicious software disguised as harmless program

Firewall: Software to protect computers against hackers

Keylogging: Software/hardware to track keystrokes on a computer to gather passwords, credit card numbers

Pharming: When fraudsters redirect net users from legitimate to fake sites

Phishing: Fraudulent e-mails and pop-ups to fool you into revealing personal information for criminal gain

Rogue dialler: Software that installs itself on computers and changes settings to dial a premium rate number instead of usual dial-up account

Spam: Unsolicited e-mails, often offering products or services in which you have no interest

Spyware: Small programs that secretly monitor sites visited, potentially violating privacy and slowing computers.

BACKING UP YOUR CRITICAL DATA

Everyone knows that critical company data held on computers should be backed up, correct? Well, many businesses, particularly smaller ones, still do not back up information contained on their key computer systems. As a result, many businesses suffer considerable, (but often not calculated) losses when their computer systems fail, and data is lost.

The methods of backing up data are varied, depending on the size of the computer system(s) involved, the networking technology used, and most importantly, the total amount of information that needs to be backed up. The facilities available range from backing up to a writable CD (capable of holding up to 700Mb), tape systems (typically capable of storing many gigabytes of information), to large system disk arrays (multiple, linked hard disks of similar or large capacity to the main network disk drives, that are used to duplicate information contained on the primary file server disk(s), creating back up copies of information online, in real time).

Whatever hardware solution your organisation uses (you do have a solution, don't you?), it is just as critical to make sure that the process is tested regularly. This is designed to ensure that the back up, which maybe carried out in an unattended mode overnight, actually does succeed and “real” data is being backed up.

We have experienced situations where a company has been backing up its critical systems for years, but on the one occasion when it was necessary to restore lost information, it was found that the tape drives were not functioning correctly, and the back up tapes were in fact, blank.

Another important factor is to ensure that the back up media (assuming it is not a disk array as described above), is stored in a secure place, remote from the main system. Again, there have been instances where back up copies of critical data have been lost in a fire, together with the main system, because the back up media was kept in the same physical location, sometimes adjacent to the main system.

Larger companies often decide to store their critical back up media off-site in secure locations. There are many companies who specialise in providing these facilities. However, when it comes to retrieving and restoring lost critical information, this can also become a major headache, since time is often of the essence

If you require help in planning an appropriate back-up regime for your organisation, please call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 for expert advice.

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.

May Day Consulting Ltd

....stress free IT

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

E-mail: info@maydayconsulting.co.uk
Internet: <http://www.maydayconsulting.co.uk>