

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.

PHORM – GOING TOO FAR?

A new online advertising service that has been developed by a commercial organisation called PHORM is currently being tested by organisations like BT, Virgin and Carphone Warehouse prior to full deployment. There is a considerable amount of controversy being generated over the service which many regard as worrying - some IT professionals and industry lawyers have even termed it illegal.

The “service” works by monitoring and taking a copy of the traffic generated when a user browses the Internet. It then analyses the text in this traffic for keywords (in web sites visited, search terms entered etc.) and then uses the resulting information to insert targeted advertisements on those sites visited by the user concerned (those sites that have signed up to use the PHORM service).

The purpose of this process is that PHORM is able to direct advertising material to you, the user, based on your browsing history or experience, which it is thought will make your web browsing considerably more personal. The advertisers, who have signed up for the PHORM service are then able to target individual web browsing users with a more “personalised” experience, offering more “relevant” advertising.

However, this entire business model and the supporting technology is falling foul of many experts and their arguments are in a couple of important areas:

Privacy – For a third party to collect or “harvest” information that you are viewing to determine your interests and preferences is being regarded as a gross invasion of privacy, and illegal. In the view of many, the system effectively performs illegal “interception” of user information. The definition of interception is given in Section 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and is illegal unless authorised.

Security – Many security experts argue that it would be very easy for criminal elements to infiltrate the technology, and store mischievous information on the user’s computer. (The Phorm system relies on a unique ID being placed on your system so that it can recognise you for the service to work).

Richard Clayton, treasurer at the Federation for Information Policy Research has been quoted as saying: “The Phorm system is highly intrusive; it’s like the Post Office opening all my letters to see what I’m interested in, merely so that I can be sent a better class of junk mail.”

Phorm have spent many months combating the increasing amount of negative concern that has been generated by many respected professionals. The company has now confirmed that there will be an opt-in feature that means that users will not have their web browsing history harvested in this way unless they specifically consent.

However, many sceptics remain very suspicious about the technology. They wonder if the safeguards that are being forced onto Phorm and their partners in this technology, are actually going to resolve the groundswell of negative opinion about the new service. Others who are involved in this enterprise include the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who will have to install appropriate technology, and the advertising companies providing the targeted information. The Information Commissioner is naturally taking a leading role in determining whether this service is legal and if so, what rules it will have to operate under. There are also many legal interests on both sides of the argument who are preparing for what could be a major conflict.

Phorm of course is stressing that it has taken much legal advice and that the service does not store any personally identifiable information about any user. It also claims that it will transform not only the browsing experience of everyone who participates, but also the economics of the Internet.

We will follow developments surrounding the deployment of this new technology and service and provide an update in a future edition of *Understand IT*.

UK BROADBAND WOES

There is already much criticism of the way UK Broadband services are sold and priced, amid claims of misleading information about achievable transmission speeds. In addition, the UK Broadband network is now suffering from an inability to cope with new services that are being introduced that consume ever larger amounts of transmission capacity on the Internet.

The introduction of the much-heralded BBC iPlayer recently has generated a considerable amount of heated discussion between the BBC and the Internet Service Providers.

The iPlayer is designed as a TV On demand service allowing users to catch up on TV programs that they have missed. The BBC claims that in the first two months, over 42 million programs have been accessed by iPlayer users.

This has caused a considerable strain on the Internet Broadband network capacity.

Whilst the BBC is taking the stand that such video on demand services have been in the pipeline a long time and now creating increased demand for broadband services, the ISPs on the other hand are suggesting that the BBC should help fund the estimated £820 million required to upgrade the UK network.

A number of technical solutions are being discussed, amid all the inflammatory comments being exchanged, but it is generally felt that the BBC will have to compromise somehow.

Some have expressed the view that the ISPs have been slow to respond to obvious developments in the direction of video on demand services. The ISPs have sold their services as cheaply as possible, based on the erroneous assumption that all users would be interested in doing is some browsing and sending emails.

MS WORD – CREATING AN INDEX

Many of us, either in business, or perhaps when studying, often have a need to create complex documents that require a contents page, index of terms, words or table of figures or references. Creating and updating items like this manually is not only very time consuming, but prone to error.

Some of the many, often unused, features of Word are those under the REFERENCE feature found within the INSERT menu in Word. This neat set of features makes the process of creating and updating these items (amongst others) relatively easy.

Whilst the setting up of these features may be a little complicated to start with, once it is done, the updating of the references is automatic.

If you have not ventured into this area before, the following provides a very brief overview of what is there.

The REFERENCE feature includes the ability to add Footnotes, Captions and Cross References, as well as Index and Tables. Space prohibits detailed discussion of all the references, so here we will concentrate on the INDEX feature found under Index & Tables.

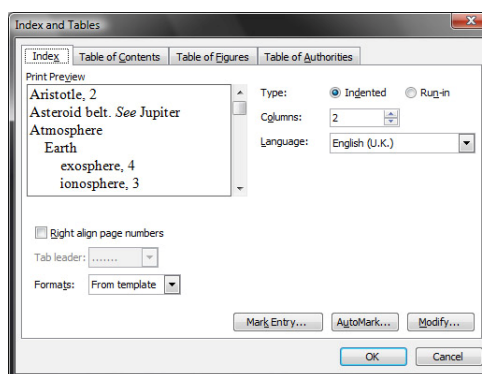
An index is a list of referenced terms, usually placed at the end of a document, showing the page number(s) on which those referred terms can be found.

Before you can create the index, which can consist of references to single words, phrases or symbols, it is necessary to mark the individual entries throughout the document.

This is obviously better done when creating the document. Alternatively, you can go through the document when it is completed and mark the index entries then.

To mark an index entry:

1. Highlight the word, phrase or symbol and select INSERT, REFERENCE, and INDEX & TABLES.
2. When you select this option, you will see a tabbed dialogue box (see below), providing access to four different types of reference – Index, Table of Contents, Table of Figures and Table of Authorities. Each of these sub-categories of reference has its own formatting options.
3. Select the INDEX tab.



4. Select MARK ENTRY and then OK. This will place a hidden marker next to the highlighted term (if you have the option to reveal hidden codes turned on, then you will see the marker).
5. Repeat this process for every term you wish to add to the Index.

To generate the Index:

Place your cursor in the document where you wish the Index to be inserted and go back to this above dialogue box and set the parameters for your Index. This can include whether you have right-aligned page numbers, a “leader” character (default is a full stop), and from where the formatting for the text of the Index should be taken – by default it will be from the document’s template, but you can change this by selecting one of the options from the FORMATS drop-down box.

Select OK, and the index is automatically created for you in the place you specified with your cursor. If you add additional index entries, the Index can be re-generated any time by repeating the final step above.

If you have problems with this feature, or any other MS Word feature, then call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457 for assistance.

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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