

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.

ONLINE STORAGE SERVICES

Online storage services have been around for a long time now. However, with the increasing availability and take-up of broadband Internet services and ever faster (maybe?) performance, online storage services are now maturing. They can offer significant advantages for businesses, particularly those who are mobile and/or need to work from different locations.

The ability to upload files to an Internet server somewhere is not new – for example Flickr, Picasa and many others have for some time been offering their subscribers the facility to upload their library of photographs (in large quantities) that can then be "published" or at least made available to friends and colleagues, if given the access rights.

Another example is Google Docs, an online set of applications similar to Microsoft Office, which allows users to create, modify and store documents, spreadsheets and presentations etc. online, so that they secure and can be retrieved by others if authorised, and accessed by the creator from any location in the world.

Microsoft, who are not known from being left out of such developments, now have Office Live, which provides an online storage facility similar to Google Docs, and installation of the facility inserts "Go to Office Live" buttons in all MS Office suite applications, allowing you to open or save documents created on your desktop to the Live online server.

The advantages of these services are perhaps obvious:

- They are generally secure – perhaps more secure than being stored on a laptop computer vulnerable to viruses, hardware failure, or even theft or loss. Most services also use encryption when uploading or downloading files
- They provide the ability to access your documents online, anywhere in the world, and significantly aiding team-work - the creation of documentation by teams of geographically remote colleagues often with built-in checking in and checking out of documents and managing revisions of complex documents.
- They perhaps eliminate the need for larger capacity local hard drives (although the cost of these is reducing in real terms).
- The cost is often extremely low (even free with some services (although facilities in free services are obviously limited. Unlimited storage capacity is also an attractive feature of one or two.

The following sites will provide details on just a small sample of available services:

<http://www.livedrive.com>

<http://www.adrive.com>

<http://www.box.net>

Neither May Day Consulting nor Facilitators International LLP warrant that any of these products are appropriate for your needs and we recommend that you obtain further advice on implementing any such service prior to making any commitments.

Call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 should you require any help in determining your strategy for online storage or its implementation.

SECURITY AND USE OF MOBILE DEVICES

RIM, the manufacturer of Blackberry PDA devices has recently suggested that companies should be more aware of how these devices are being used within their organisation and applying more control over their use – to the extent of banning the use of employees' own devices, the content of which they will have little or no knowledge about, nor the security features that it may have.

Their concern is based on the security implications of large numbers of employees travelling around and not applying even simple security precautions to the devices. They point out that the information contained on a Blackberry (or any other PDA – Personal Digital Assistant) can be not only commercially sensitive, but potentially valuable.

Statistics published have shown that around 63,000 mobile telephones and PDAs were left in taxis in a six month period in 2005. Today, that figure is probably even higher.

RIM believes that IT managers should not be complacent over the potential loophole in their security policies and procedures. Staff should also be educated to treat their PDAs in a similar fashion to their wallet.

For those organisations large enough and with a potentially serious security problem, RIM have produced a set of over 450 security policies that can be applied to single users or groups of users as part of an information management infrastructure.

If your organisation uses these devices, and requires some advice, please call 01224 697457 for help.

ONLINE PRIVACY – A LITTLE RELIEF (BUT NOT MUCH!)

In the past, we have published a couple of articles on this subject – the last one being in the January 2009 edition of *Understand IT*.

In the previous articles, we briefly discussed government plans for creating a large central UK database of all communications within the UK, and managed by the Home Office. It was intended that this central resource would include the storage of details (sender, receiver, date and time, but not the content) of all landline and mobile phone calls, emails, communications via social networking sites or instant messaging systems and details of web sites visited.

The partial relief is that it appears that the government has taken on board the large amount of criticism (tinted with a major dose of cynicism too) from the opposition and the general public, and agreed that the concept of a massive single database of such information would NOT be appropriate.

The Home Secretary has however stated that doing nothing, in the face of ever sophisticated online crime, is not an option. They therefore plan to compel Communications Service Providers (ISPs and telecommunications network service companies) to maintain such details, organised in such a way as to make retrieval of data easy for the Security services.

It is estimated that the cost of implementing these requirements will cost around £2 billion, much of which will be paid to service providers as compensation for the necessary work involved in maintaining records and making them searchable.

You can read more on the governments' proposals and download the consultation document "Protecting the public in a changing communications environment" here:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2009-communications-data>

The consultation will end on July 20, 2009.

YET MORE ON THE PHORM SAGA...

The controversy over the planned "behavioural Advertising" service being tested and launched by Phorm (see last month's edition) continues to rage.

The BBC has now obtained copies of email correspondence between the Home Office and Phorm in which it would appear that the Home Office were seeking Phorm's approval for the position paper prepared by the government department.

Many who oppose the proposed service have expressed total amazement that the government appears to have been colluding with Phorm over the terms and conditions under which it would operate.

Phorm have repeatedly stated that the service they are offering meets all the UK and EU regulations and includes all the necessary safeguards. However, the constant pressure on the company from many quarters has led it to launch a web site aimed at countering much of the negative criticism of what many regard as a potentially gross invasion of privacy.

The web site can be found here:

<http://www.stopprouplay.com/>

USING A THESAURUS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR REPORTS

Most of us who use Microsoft Word for creating documents – reports, letters, memos etc. or even a best selling novel will often use the spell-checker to ensure that no spelling mistakes occur in our work.

However, how many of us who perhaps write professionally have the bad habit of repeating words, which can make the content of your report or letter less informative or easy to read.

Help is at hand by using the built-in Thesaurus in MS Word to improve your report and hopefully convince the reader of the point you are trying to make.

The MS Thesaurus is only a couple of mouse-clicks away. Simply highlight the word concerned, and right-click to produce a drop-down menu. One item on this menu will be SYNONYMS. Select this, and a further drop-down menu will appear with a list of words with the same or similar meaning that may just explain your point more succinctly.

For example, if you were typing this article and you highlighted the word "informative" in the second paragraph above, the synonyms produced by the Thesaurus feature would include:

educational
revealing
edifying
enlightening
useful
helpful
instructive

Using an online facility like this is much easier than searching for a large volume in the library. If Word cannot find a suitable synonym, then you also have the option to go online to expand the search further.

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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