

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.

NEW VERSIONS OF WINDOWS OUT SOON

The long awaited re-write of the Windows operating system is now scheduled for release in mid 2006. Code-named "Longhorn", the new system will come 5 years after the release of the current flagship, Windows XP. This is the longest gap between releases of new operating systems since Microsoft produced Microsoft Windows '95.

The delay in Longhorn's release is reportedly because of Microsoft's attempts to make sure that it is water-tight in terms of its security features. Whether they will succeed remains to be seen. Past experiences tells us that there are always people out in cyber space that will find and exploit loopholes in almost any piece of software ever written!

As well as much improved security, the new operating system will have a completely new look for the desktop and include sophisticated search facilities for information residing almost anywhere, whether on the computer itself, any local network, or the Internet.

In advance of the release of Longhorn, Microsoft has just released a major update to Windows XP, as a rehearsal for the arrival of Longhorn. The updated XP will be known as Windows XP Professional x64 Edition.

It will begin shipping this month (May), and will be targeted at business rather than home users. Its main advantage (as indicated in its name) is that it is a 64-bit operating system. This means that it can process double the amount of information in the same time slot, as the standard Windows XP (which is a 32-bit operating system). As usual though, the developers of applications have to catch up to make their products capable of taking advantage of the increased speed.

"PHISHING" – BEATING THE FRAUD

We have discussed the issue of "Phishing" before in Understand IT, but it can be so devastating for the unwary that it is worth repeating.

Phishing is the name given to the process by which fraudsters attempt to get unsuspecting users to give away personal details by pretending to be legitimate (usually banking) web sites.

Typically a "Phisher" will create a bogus web site as an exact replica of a legitimate bank site. They will then send out millions of e-mails inviting unsuspecting

account holders to visit their bogus site where they are told that their account is about to expire, or give some other plausible reason for the user to fill in a form containing all their personal details, including account ID, passwords etc. The unsuspecting user's account is then plundered.

Organised fraud has now become involved in these scams, because they have proved to be very lucrative and the methods more sophisticated. Many such sites include the ability to "spoof" or mimic the web address (URL) of the real bank web site showing in your browser window, making it even more realistic.

Some help is at hand - there are now some "add-on" programs available for browsers that will tell you if you have been diverted to a spoof site and whether the address appearing in the address bar of the browser is real or not.

For example eBay (the auction web site) has suffered much from phishing attacks whereby unsuspecting users bid (and pay) for goods and never receive them. The eBay toolbar turns green when you are on the real eBay site, but red when not. However, this is probably only of use if you are a regular customer to eBay.

There are also other, more general add-ons available for your browser. One, from an organisation called Netcraft offers a downloadable toolbar for your browser that it claims will identify most of the known bogus web sites and alert you if you are diverted to one of them. The organisation is an online community that pools information about bogus web sites. It describes itself as a "giant neighbourhood watch scheme". It can be downloaded for free from:

<http://toolbar.netcraft.com/>

Using the toolbar, you can report any bogus sites that you encounter and add them to those already known about, thereby helping the endless task of protecting everyone from them. Another toolbar is available from Cloudmark at:

<http://www.cloudmark.com/products/safetybar/download/>

There are also a number of international organisations that have been set up to exchange information and inform all users about phishing:

<http://www.antiphishing.org/>

<http://www.phishreport.net/>

Alternatively, call Alan Finch at May Day Consulting on (01224) 697457 for help.

MOZILLA FIREFOX SECURITY SCARE

Just as Mozilla reported that downloads of its “open source” internet browser known as Firefox exceeded 50 million, several security companies announced that they had identified two potentially serious flaws in the browser.

It appears that these flaws could potentially allow hackers to install and run malicious code or programs on an unsuspecting user’s computer. However, they also announced that there had been no reported instances of this happening.

Mozilla Foundation immediately advised its users to disable the ability to run Java scripts and began working on solutions to the reported flaws.

The update to the Firefox browser is now available and can be downloaded from this address:

<http://www.mozilla.org/security/>

If you are a user of Mozilla Firefox, then you need to check if the update has already been applied to your copy of the browser, since there is an automatic update facility within Firefox, which may have already completed the download.

To check your version, launch the browser and go to the HELP text menu and select ABOUT. The updated version is 1.0.4. If your copy is an older version than this, then go to the address shown above, and download the update manually.

The lesson of this is that no one is free from vulnerability to attack from many potential sources. No matter how secure the publisher of software may claim their software is, there is always someone who can potentially take advantage of loopholes.

Here at May Day Consulting, we will continue to alert readers to any potential dangers from hackers, fraudsters, viruses and other hazards that could potentially damage your wealth!

INTERNET TELEPHONY (3)

In the December 2004 and February 2005 editions of Understand IT, we covered various aspects of the development of Internet Telephony or Voice over IP as it is sometimes called.

The potential for delivering cheap telephone services using an existing broadband Internet connection is not being lost on many companies and a range of new services are now becoming available.

One such service is being provided by a US based company - Vonage.

For a small monthly subscription (£9.99 for home users and £18.99 for small business users), you can have free unlimited calls within the UK and Ireland. For a small additional charge per minute, you can make calls to any international destination.

On subscription, Vonage will provide a “phone adapter” which plugs directly into your broadband modem or router. You then connect any standard telephone to the adapter and you can make regular telephone calls via your broadband connection. The following diagram (courtesy of the Vonage web site) shows the hardware configuration.



Their service is designed to be attractive even to those users who do not have a computer, but wish to make cheap local and long distance telephone calls. However, how many of us have a broadband connection without a computer? Nevertheless, Vonage’s services have proved very successful in the US and they hope to replicate this success in the UK.

For more information, visit the Vonage web site at:

<http://www.vonage.co.uk/>

Obviously there are other players, who realise the potential for these services, amongst them BT (of course), Wanadoo (the ISP) and AOL are all trialling similar services.

In addition, as mentioned in earlier articles, Yahoo and MSN Messenger also incorporate voice services, although are not as straight-forward as plugging a standard telephone into your broadband. There is also Skype, whose Internet Telephony service, and particularly SKYPE-OUT for making off-network calls continues to go from strength to strength.

If you would like to know more about how you can significantly reduce your local and international telephone costs, then call Alan Finch now on (01224) 697457.

We would like to stress here that neither May Day Consulting, nor Facilitators UK provides any warranty or recommendation with regard to any product or service discussed in any of the Understand IT articles. It is the responsibility of anyone considering purchasing or making use of any service discussed here to make sure that they meet their requirements and in their judgement are fit for purpose.

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.

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