

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.

DON'T BE INTIMIDATED BY TOO MUCH "HYPE"

It seems as though almost every article we place in *Understand IT* outlines yet another security flaw or threat of some kind (and this edition is no different!). One of our objectives is to highlight some of the problems that we face and offer advice on how to cope with them.

However, at the same time, it is perhaps worth commenting that the security problems that are almost inherent in using technology and the internet should not deter us from using the technology to improve our business and hopefully provide a competitive edge.

We should not be intimidated by the environment we are working in, and thereby avoid implementing and using technology that will benefit our businesses.

One of our other objectives is to provide some perspective to small and medium enterprises and highlight where technology can be an over-whelming benefit to improve business and gain that competitive edge. As with most things in life, it is a matter of balance and good judgement. Taking the most appropriate precautions is necessary in almost everything we do in life, and we should not be deterred in taking all the advantages that technology can provide.

Try not to be too intimidated by what is often media "hype", but make reasoned decisions based on your businesses requirements.

May Day Consulting aims to provide impartial, sound and effective help and advice to make sure that your technology works for you and not against you. Call Alan Finch for an informal discussion on how we can help your business improve.

INFORMATION LEAKAGE – A GROWING THREAT

If your company has a Local Area Network, it is likely that you are unaware of the number of different devices that can be connected to that network without your IT manager realising it.

For example, with new technologies like Bluetooth, Firewire, USB and Wi-Fi, portable devices can be connected to a network, perhaps for bona fide reasons, but often not. They can also be used to make information easily transportable, and therefore a potential security risk.

You may believe that this is a problem mainly for large corporations, but it can affect small businesses too. True, large corporations have a greater exposure because of the size and complexity of their networks. However, small businesses should also be aware of the potential for information to disappear, perhaps with economic, legal or embarrassing consequences.

In the never-ending drive to become more competitive, technology is enabling users to become completely mobile – working from home or on the road – in fact anywhere. This obviously can extend the company network to virtually any location where there is access to a land-line telephone, GPRS mobile or Wi-Fi "hotspot".

Similarly, devices like USB memory drives are becoming extremely inexpensive and capable of storing gigabytes of information that can be transferred from one computer to another in seconds with no specific software or hardware controls.

Even portable media players are now becoming smaller, cheaper, contain many gigabytes of information and can be connected to a PC via a USB or Firewire connection. Bluetooth-enabled devices will soon appear that will then require no physical connection at all, and in theory can be used to download or synchronise information contained on a company-owned computer (MP3 formatted music is just another computer file and the media devices do not care what is being synchronised!)

A report recently produced by a security company based in Luxembourg highlights the above security problems and more. They are offering a software solution that enables a company to control the variety of devices that can be connected to a company computer or network. This may, or may not be the correct solution for your company, but the report makes interesting reading. You can download a copy from here:

http://www.securewave.com/sanctuary_DC.jsp

The pre-requisites for identifying the most appropriate solution for your organisation will be firstly to recognise that there is a problem, and secondly to formulate acceptable usage policies for the plethora of technology devices that may be used or brought into your office by personnel.

If you require assistance in helping to develop policies, procedures and identifying appropriate solutions to these issues, please contact Alan Finch on 01224 697457.

NEW TROJAN BASED EXTORTION THREAT

A new and more malicious type of Trojan has recently been discovered in the US. This new threat is unique so far. The Trojan (a small computer program that once on an infected computer, activates itself either immediately or at some pre-determined time and carries out some function) is downloaded when an unsuspecting user visits a certain web site.

The "payload", once activated automatically scans the victim's computer and encrypts (encodes) files it finds, rendering them unusable. The Trojan then leaves an electronic "ransom note", demanding money in return for providing the de-coder to unlock the encrypted files. The note provides details of an online account where the ransom should be paid.

This is probably one of the first instances of the use of cryptography against a user, rather than providing protection from theft of sensitive information.

The infection from the Trojan occurs by exploiting yet another vulnerability found in Internet Explorer.

As usual, you are encouraged to make sure you have anti-virus software installed on all your computers, and that the virus definition database is updated regularly.

You should also install and configure a firewall (one is provided as part of Windows XP – Service Pack 2), and use Microsoft Windows Update feature to make sure that your copy of Windows is up to date with the latest security patches.

Do not open unexpected or unfamiliar attachments in e-mail messages – particularly if they contain hyperlinks to unknown web sites, as this is how this particular Trojan infects a computer.

For help, as usual, call Alan Finch at May Day Consulting on 01224 697457.

BEATING THE ROGUE DIALLERS (2)

In the April 2005 edition of Understand IT, we covered the issue of "rogue" dialling software. These programs are often downloaded from web sites to an unsuspecting user's computer and results in future internet connections being dialled using a premium rate number, thus incurring massive phone bills.

We promised to keep you updated, and now BT has released a program that can be downloaded for free. Called "BT Privacy Online modem protection software", the software can be downloaded from here:

<http://www.bt.com/btprivacyonline/>

This small utility program will automatically start whenever you start your computer and will monitor the number that your computer dials to access the Internet. It will then alert you if the modem is programmed to dial a premium rate number. It will NOT stop the call. It is therefore up to you to make the necessary changes to the number dialled by your computer modem.

If you are a broadband user, this scam does not apply to you, since there is no dialling involved in accessing the Internet. However, be aware that if you have converted your original telephone line into a broadband connection, you should make sure that your old modem is disconnected from the telephone line (which still exists in parallel with the broadband link). Often unsuspecting users fail to do this and calls can still be made via the old modem and telephone line, sometimes without the user being aware of it.

DISK STORAGE GOES THROUGH THE ROOF!

The constant craving for ever more storage capacity on disk drives seems to be going on unabated. Together with greater capacity, physical size is also decreasing.

Seagate, a leading hard disk manufacturer is now offering a one inch drive with 8Gb capacity and a 2.5 inch drive with 160Gb capacity which uses a new recording technique that it has developed.

It is not just computers that are using these drives. Media players, hand-held computers, mobile phones and cars are also beginning to use these minute drives. In fact, it is estimated that car industry will be the largest consumer of these small 2.5 inch sized 60-80Gb capacity disk drives in the future. They will be used in in-car entertainment and global positioning systems.

The sky is the limit in terms of capacity – currently a 500Gb capacity drive is available, which is capable of holding up to 80 hours of High-Definition TV content

This also means that these devices can be used for backing-up large volumes of critical computer data.

INTERACTIVE STREET FURNITURE

On a lighter note, we read recently that Cambridge has installed new public benches and litter bins that contain technology that enables them to move, chuckle and even sing when the sun comes out. The street furniture is "interactive" and able to respond to members of the public!

It is part of an Arts Council and Lottery Fund project and they are located in The Junction arts venue.

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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