

# 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.

## **MANAGING KNOWLEDGE EFFECTIVELY – KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS**

The application of technology has revolutionised how many business function and enabled many smaller organisations to compete effectively with larger rivals. However, there is one thing that technology is good at doing that can actually impede a company's struggle for competitiveness and overwhelm business managers. What is it? Providing information.

Many business managers are beginning to drown in information, and are finding it ever more difficult to make effective decisions because of information overload. What most managers now need are effective tools to filter and summarise the mass of business information to enable them to make reasoned judgements. IT is failing to provide adequate tools to many businesses and this is now beginning to impede business development and competitiveness.

It has always been notoriously difficult to provide information to senior management of a company, in a form that is concise and summarised in the most appropriate way. Finding ways of managing the surfeit of information or knowledge that flows into most organisations is going to be the next major challenge for IT in the coming few years.

A recent survey underlined this challenge. It was conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit, and sponsored by Tata Consulting Services. A free copy of the report can be downloaded from here:

[http://www.eiu.com/site\\_info.asp?info\\_name=eiu\\_TCS\\_know\\_how](http://www.eiu.com/site_info.asp?info_name=eiu_TCS_know_how)

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## **BACKING-UP YOUR CRITICAL INFORMATION**

We have touched on this subject many times in the past, but is worth reinforcing, since many do not heed the warnings until it is too late!

One client recently had a major power failure that brought down the company's computer systems. On restoration of the power supply, the hard disk on one of their systems failed to function. It happened to be an external hard disk drive on which the company's most critical and sensitive information was stored.

Fortunately, it was a minor problem, and a restart of the computer caused the Windows XP operating system to recognise the hard drive once more. Luckily, the computer concerned was connected to the mains power supply via a surge protection device.

However, the client was, for a while, contemplating what might have been had the disk head crashed onto the disk and the drive become completely unusable. Why? Because it had not been backed up because the volume of information was now too large to fit onto a CD, which was the previous method of backing up the information.

This is a salutary lesson, one not lost on our client. He asked us to provide assistance in designing an appropriate back-up and disaster recover regime for his most critical company information.

The solution was first, to migrate the information to a network server, together with similar "islands of critical information" that were discovered on other computer systems within the organisation. Then to install tape back-up device, large enough to contain all the organisation's critical information. An appropriate software back-up program was then installed to handle the back-up process automatically, in an unattended mode each night.

Procedures were produced to ensure that someone had the responsibility of checking that the back-up process completed successfully each night, and periodic checks on restoring information are now made, to ensure firstly that the information is being backed up correctly, and secondly that single, multiple or the entire volume can be restored in a disaster situation.

Finally, the back-up tapes are kept securely in a fire-proof safe, in an adjacent building to ensure that they are themselves kept secure in case of need.

Does this scenario seem familiar to you or your organisation? Unfortunately, it is still all too common.

Your own needs, whether a small owner-managed organisation, or a larger organisation with many networked PCs will be the same, it is only the scale that needs to be considered.

Many smaller organisations are now using external hard disk drives to back-up their critical information – in some cases across a local area network. Such hard drives are now inexpensive, and available in capacities of many hundreds of Gigabytes. They can also be easily removed from a system and stored securely.

Alternatively, if your needs are small, a CD (holding up to 700Mb) or even a DVD disk (capable of holding up to 4.7Gb) are possible solutions – but of course, you will need a CD or DVD drive that is capable of "burning" these disk formats.

If the main computer system or systems in your organisation are not being backed-up regularly, we encourage you to do something now! We know the disruption and financial loss that can result from the failure of a critical computer system and the consequent loss of information.

If you require help in designing an appropriate and secure back-up regime for your organisation, then call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 immediately.

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## TRACKING DOWN ZOMBIES

Much of the spam e-mail that is now circulating on the Internet is generated by thousands of unsuspecting PCs that have been quietly taken over by producers of spam.

Such PCs have been graphically described as Zombies, since the users of these PCs are blissfully ignorant that their systems have effectively been hijacked and are being used in such a nefarious way. They might only sense that their system's performance is degraded slightly. They may blame it on their internet connection, little suspecting that in fact, they are churning out spam e-mails and often helping to launch denial of service attacks.

Perpetrators of spam have recently begun to cooperate with virus writers to produce viruses and Trojans that infect PCs and enlist them as Zombies, in their efforts to propagate as much e-mail spam as possible.

All are vulnerable to this activity – large organisations and government, since they have large complex networks that are difficult to police and protect, SMEs and home users because they often are not aware of the threat.

Anti-virus company Sophos is now offering a service called Zombie Alert that monitors activity and advises service subscribers when any computer on their network is found to have sent spam to Sophos's extensive global network of spam traps.

The service also provides rapid notification to customers if their Internet Protocol (IP) addresses are listed in public Domain Name Server Blackhole Lists (DNSBL). This information helps customers locate, disinfect, and protect these systems from future attacks.

More information on the product can be found at:

<http://www.sophos.com/products/alertservices/zombiealert/>

Sophos also publish much useful information about spam and how to deal with it at:

<http://www.sophos.com/spaminfo/>

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.

## THIN CLIENT TECHNOLOGY

We have briefly touched on this subject in the past, since the technology has been around and gaining acceptance for a number of years now. However, Citrix, one of the principal producers of this technology has now produced a thin client solution aimed at SMEs (Small and Medium sized enterprises).

For those who have not heard of the technology before, it is a set of hardware and software solutions that when implemented correctly can save a significant amount of a company's IT budget.

The concept is broadly that instead of providing all networked users with heavily configured PCs, each with large hard disks, and powerful processors, the processing power, and software applications are stored on a large central server, with the client PC having only a minimal specification – hence the "thin client" name.

For those who are aware of the development of IT over the past 20-30 years, this might sound a little like returning to mainframe computing. To some extent this is true, but the technology used is entirely different and the concept lends itself very much to remote computing, thereby aiding those organisations that are more distributed in nature or having many home or mobile workers.

Much of the potential cost savings, which can be significant, is in the management of a network of users, control over the desktop and considerably simplified upgrade of both hardware and software, which is all maintained centrally on the server, rather than on individual workstations.

The Citrix Access Essentials solution, which is aimed at organisations with up to 75 users, claims that the cost of providing office applications and remote access is approximately £135 per employee, per year.

For more information on the subject, visit the following site:

<http://www.citrix.com/English/NE/news/news.asp?newsID=21380>

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## EXPLANATIONS BY PROGRAMMERS....

- I've never heard about that.
- It did work yesterday.
- How is this possible?
- I can't test everything!
- Bug? That's not a bug, that's a feature.

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....stress free IT

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