

# 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.

## **DIGITAL ARCHIVING – POTENTIAL BLACK HOLE**

The chief executive of the National Archives recently raised an interesting point regarding the long-term storage of information in digital format, and the potential loss of this information because the formats in which it has been stored are no longer commercially supported.

The problems associated with the long-term archiving of important information in digital format have probably not occurred to many of us, but the implications could be extremely serious for our businesses. It has been estimated that Europe wastes more than 3 billion euros in business value every year in dealing with issues of digital archiving and retrieval.

The CE of the National Archive was making the point that information has been (and continues to be) archived without much consideration about how that information will be retrieved in future years. He likened the problem to a “black hole” where the information is kept, but from where it cannot be retrieved or viewed.

Technology, both hardware and software, has developed immensely in recent years, and earlier technology is now no longer supported. For example, information may have been archived in past years onto 5.25” floppy diskettes that were quite popular in the 1980s. It is however, agreed that incompatible hardware is less of a problem than obsolete file formats.

Similarly, proprietary software applications may have been used to create documents, spreadsheets, databases etc. and those applications will have undergone numerous revisions in recent years, probably without any backward-compatibility. The result is that the original files can no longer be retrieved by the latest versions of the same software (assuming that the software is still commercially available).

It is now obvious that information stored in digital format may take up considerably less space, and is ostensibly easier to search and retrieve, it is at the same time possibly less resilient than paper stored in filing cabinets!

To address this problem, Microsoft has now formed a partnership with the National Archives to develop tools that will enable an estimated 580 terabytes (1 terabyte = 1,000 gigabytes) of information to be converted and retrieved. They are developing emulators that will allow information created under “legacy” software to be retrieved.

The British Library and National Archives are also both members of the “Planets” project which brings together European National Libraries and Archives and technology companies to address the issue of digital preservation.

The long-term solution is felt to be the increased use of ‘open’ file formats as opposed to the past proprietary formats used by Microsoft, and the constant awareness of ensuring backward-compatibility.

If your organisation has decided, or you are required by regulatory authorities or others, to retain digital information for longer than, say 5 years, then it would be wise to re-visit your information retention procedures and the technology and formats used to maintain your archives. This would help guard against your information being isolated in a technological “black hole”.

Call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 for assistance or further advice on information retention policies, procedures and technology options.

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## **WINDOWS VISTA – SYSTEM AND INFORMATION PROTECTION – PROS AND CONS**

Over coming editions of Understand IT, we will provide a few insights to some of the facilities included in the new operating system, explaining the positives and constructively covering some of the negatives.

This month, we begin by looking at a couple of features designed to provide protection for your system and your information.

### ***User Account Control***

This is a very useful feature that is designed to protect your system from unauthorised changes or installations or to warn you that changes you are trying to make to the system might affect other users of the system.

The facility can be switched on or off, and it can be found in Control Panel, under User Accounts.

If switched on, when a new program is being installed, or some other change is being made to the system, Vista will issue one of four warnings, depending on what is being attempted:

- Windows needs your permission to continue
- A program needs your permission to continue
- An unidentified program wants access to your computer
- This program has been blocked

In each case, you will be asked to provide the administrator's password if you are not logged on as administrator or do not have administration authority. If you do, then you just need to assent to the action, once you have verified that it is safe to do so and you understand the implications of the action.

This feature is an excellent safeguard, particularly if you have multiple users of one Vista computer and wish to control who can install software. It also prevents external unauthorised installation of malicious software on your computer system.

### ***Back-up and Restore***

Previously, you may have had to purchase an expensive data back-up program to handle the automated backing up of your critical information on to some external or removable storage media.

Vista now includes a rather rudimentary back-up feature that may be adequate for many users' requirements. The Backup and Restore Centre, which can be found either in the list of programs under the Start Menu or in Control Panel, provides a configurable facility for backing up some of your most important information, automatically at a time that you specify.

The only problem is that the configurability of the feature is a little limited. It provides two primary back-up options:

- The entire computer – this provides a complete backup image of your computer system
- Back-up of just your files and folders.

On the assumption that you do not want a complete image back-up (you would need a large external hard disk of equivalent size to the main hard disk in your system for this) then the second option is perhaps more likely.

In this case, the feature perhaps understandably does not back-up the Windows operating system software itself, nor any executable programs you have installed - it assumes that you will have the original media for restoring these. Neither does it backup files that are encrypted or stored under the older FAT disk filing system (they have to be in NTFS format – which is actually a much more efficient filing system). Files that are in the re-cycle bin, temporary files and user settings are also not backed up.

It then only allows you to backup your files and folders (those containing documents, photos, videos etc.) - you cannot specify which folders and/or hard disk(s) to backup. It assumes that you want all files backed up, without you being able to specify which files or where they are located.-

The feature also includes the ability to restore information that was previously backed up, in the event of a system failure or accidental deletion or corruption of an important file, folder, or complete system, depending on which option you original selected.

This built-in feature therefore does have some limitations, but you can at least reliably backup all your critical information from within Windows, without the need to purchase additional software. In our view, this is a major advantage, since in our experience, too many users pay scant regard to backing up their information.

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## **VOICE OVER IP (VOIP) SERVICE PROVIDERS MUST ALLOW EMERGENCY CALLS**

OFCOM, the Office for Communications regulator has recently proposed to the industry that if a VOIP service provider offers its users the ability to make calls to regular (non-VOIP) telephone numbers, then it must also allow calls to the 999 emergency service number. Responses to its proposals must be submitted to OFCOM by September and implementation should be completed by mid 2008 if the regulators proposals are accepted

At the moment, only BT and Vonage appear to allow their users to call 999 from their VOIP enabled telephones/PCs. OFCOM maintains, quite rightly, that any VOIP telephone user should be able to dial 999, without having to spend precious time looking for a conventional telephone line to make an emergency call.

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## **WINDOWS VISTA – SERVICE PACK 1 SOON?**

Microsoft have recently issued a number of software “patches” for Windows Vista, and this has led to rumours that they will soon issue the first “service pack” for Vista.

Normally, most users will take advantage of the automatic update feature built into both Windows XP and the various versions of Vista. However, many do not, preferring to wait until Microsoft issues a major batch of fixes in the form of a Service Pack.

Many of you may also be waiting until Vista has under-gone that first major update before making the decision to upgrade. This has always been the general opinion in the case of earlier versions of Windows. However, with automatic updating features and the extensive testing that Vista underwent prior to its release, then maybe the idea of waiting is not necessary any longer – unless there are no pressing business reasons for investing in an upgrade to Vista at all!

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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