

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.

ANOTHER NEW VERSION OF MS OFFICE – IS THERE A BUSINESS CASE TO UPGRADE?

Many of you may have stopped upgrading your version of the Microsoft Office product suite, since it is felt that there is no business case to upgrade. Some rightly argue that the cost of upgrading is high, and many of the suite's existing facilities are hardly ever used, so why spend more on upgrading to the new version to provide even more facilities that you may not use.

However, whilst this is perhaps a common view, there are in fact advantages to upgrading, particularly if you have "skipped" a couple of generations of Office.

For example, there are some very useful new features in the Office XP and Office 2003 versions, in addition to a significant reduction in the "memory leak" problems that seemed to plague earlier versions.

Memory leak refers to a problem with the inefficient releasing of system memory when repeatedly launching and closing Office applications (particularly Word). This problem often left the user with "insufficient memory" error message when trying to launch other applications, and could only be resolved by re-starting the computer.

Microsoft recently announced the launch date of their latest version – Office 12 at the end of 2006. This new version will be closely integrated with the new Windows operating system (to be called Windows Vista); and secondly, will have two related innovations – the use of "open" file formats for documents.

In future, the default file format for Office 12 Word documents will be XML (Extensible Markup Language). The standard .doc proprietary format will still be available, making the new version backward compatible with previous versions of Office. However, when saving documents it will save them in XML by default, and you will need to select the old file format if required.

The advantage of this is that XML is "open", and will make Word documents smaller, much easier to manipulate and most importantly, they will be compatible with other non-Microsoft XML documents. This will enable them to be read by and integrated with third party applications that use this format.

The second innovation is the integration of the Adobe Acrobat PDF (Portable Document Format), allowing documents created in Word to be saved as a PDF file as one of the choices in the SAVE AS dialogue.

PDF is now a de facto open standard for the display of documents across applications and hardware platforms. It is believed that you will not be able to edit documents created in this way though – for this you will need to obtain a copy of Adobe Distiller.

It is further understood that Microsoft is now developing its own alternative to PDF, to be known as XML Paper Specification (XPS). This is in line with Microsoft's strategy of producing a print layout language that supports work-flow.

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this article, many will find that the business case for upgrading will be there, it is just a case of carrying out a detailed evaluation and mapping your needs to the benefits to your organisation.

If you require help in carrying out an analysis of your needs, then call Alan Finch on 01224 697457.

IMPROVED SECURITY FOR MOBILE PHONES

Nokia and Symantec have been working closely together for a couple of years now, in an effort to provide solutions to what many see as the next "battleground" for secure communications.

The latest model mobile phones – "smartphones" are changing the way many company personnel carry out business on behalf of their employers. Users are now storing an increased amount of personal, and company information on these devices and creators of mobile "malware" are not far behind this increasing trend.

Both Nokia and Symantec are working hard to provide the appropriate amount of protection, which is based on Symantec's "Autoprotect" features that will now be capable of being pre-loaded on Nokia's Series 60 and Symbian operating system mobile phone devices.

This software will run continuously in the background and provide protection against viruses or other malicious software delivered by email, SMS (Short Message Services or Text), MMS (Multi-Media Message Services) and web services.

It will also provide a manual scanning facility and include a built-in firewall to trap suspicious and unwanted intrusion from malicious third parties via any wireless, LAN or WAN connections. A 'live update' feature to make sure that the software is kept up to date will also be available.

BEWARE OF SECOND-HAND SOFTWARE

The licencing of software is a mine-field for the unwary, and infringement of the licencing terms and conditions of any software can be easy, and can open many companies to the possibility of legal action under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

If your company purchases second-hand computer equipment for example, you should make sure that any existing loaded software on that hardware has accompanying licences. If it does not, then you will be operating the software illegally.

Similarly, if you sell hardware and retain a copy of the software, then you will be operating that software illegally under the Act.

You may, of course sell equipment, complete with software - the Act does allow you to transfer the licence to the purchaser. However, this assumes that there are no express terms in the original licence that forbids the transfer. You should therefore read the small print in the licence documentation that came with the software.

This is particularly important in the situation where a company is sold, together with its computing and software facilities. The company taking ownership of the IT assets should make sure that the licences, presumably accompanying those assets, permit transfer of licences to the new entity.

The lesson is, make sure you have licences for all software, and if it has been purchased second-hand, then make sure that the licence conditions allowed this transfer in the first place. There is little point in purchasing assets that you cannot use.

LINKSYS CORDLESS VOIP PHONE

Continuing our coverage of topics on Voice over IP (VOIP), Linksys (now owned by Cisco) have recently announced that they are to launch a cordless telephone that is compatible with Skype (see previous articles on Skype). The new telephone (Model CIT200 - see image below) will plug directly into your computer via a USB port.



As it is compatible with Skype, it will display the existing Skype contact listing on its LCD display.

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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The phone will support calls to non-PC regular telephone numbers (fixed and mobile) – this is known as “Skypeout”, as well as the capability to receive incoming calls from non-Skype users (using the “Skypein” facility. It will also support the new Skype voicemail feature.

The phone is expected to be on sale in late October and its cost will be around £75.

MORE SKYPE FACILITIES

The strength and range of services now available via the Skype software on your PC continues to grow. The latest innovations include an ability to use Skype whilst on the move.

Skype Zones is a new facility enabling mobile users with laptops to access Skype via thousands of WiFi “hotspots” – there are 18,000+ Skype Zones to date, nearly 5,500 of them in the UK. To use Skype Zones, you will need to download a small piece of software from the Skype web site (<http://www.skype.com>) and subscribe to the service at a cost of €6.50 per month for unlimited use.

Once within range of one “Skype-enabled” Skype Zone, the software detects it and asks if you wish to logon to the service using your existing Username and password. You can then make Skype calls as though you were back in your office.

A full list of Skype Zones, including those in the UK can be found at:

<http://skypezones.boingo.com/search.html>

ARE YOU STILL FAILING TO BACK-UP REGULARLY?

Yet another survey recently high-lighted that as many as one third of businesses in the UK are not following rudimentary back-up procedures for their corporate, computer-based information.

The same survey, by IT analyst organisation Quocirca also noted that as many as 80% of companies who do back-up their critical data, end up storing the back up media in the same location, or close to the computer centre or area.

The survey covered 250 large organisations and is worrying when the loss of critical data can have a serious impact on the business.

A plea to you all – **Make sure you have a tried and tested back-up procedure that is regularly implemented.**

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