

# 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.

## WEBMAIL SCAM PROPOGATING

Within the past month, security experts Websense have announced that they have detected a significant increase in the amount of spam mail being distributed via many of the most popular web-based email services (Hotmail, Yahoo, Google mail etc.).

They believe that many of these mail accounts have been compromised, and are generating spam email messages. Many of these spam messages invite recipients to visit new shopping web sites, which are usually fake sites.

When an unsuspecting user visits one of these sites, they can either be coerced into typing personal details into a web form that is then used for fraudulent purposes, or the site will download a small program to your system that records individual key-strokes and sends them to the fraudster. These "key loggers" have become more prevalent in recent times and will often reveal bank account numbers and other personal information to the fraudsters.

Users are once again urged to be cautious when visiting web sites offering so-called "cannot be missed opportunities", especially if you do not know the sender of emails with such invitations.

You should also consider including "phishing" and "key-logger" detection facilities in your PC security suite if it does not already have such protection built in.

As usual, if you have any security questions or concerns, then May Day Consulting can assist in putting your mind at rest. Please call Alan Finch on 01224 697457.

## MICROSOFT RELEASES BUMPER SET OF SECURITY FIXES

Microsoft has just released an extremely large set of security fixes for some of its key software packages, including Windows and Internet Explorer. This latest release, in what has for the past 3 years, been a regular monthly exercise, is the largest for a long time and consists of 13 security bulletins dealing with 34 potential vulnerabilities. Eight of the updates have been classed as "critical" – the most serious level of vulnerability.

The majority of users will receive the update automatically, providing they have configured their Windows operating systems for automatic retrieval of Microsoft Updates.

However, users can find links to download them on Microsoft's web site security pages.

We recommend that you configure your copy of Windows to automatically retrieve updates to Windows and other Microsoft software that you have installed on your system. This will mean that you will not have to worry about your system being kept up to date. When automatic updates have been enabled, you then have further options for automatic installation of updates, or automatic download, but installation at a time that is convenient to you. Since some updates require a system re-start, this latter option is probably more appropriate, as it avoids your system being re-started whilst you are working.

## APPLE SNOW LEOPARD DATA LOSS BUG

Apple's latest release of their OS X operating system for the Apple Mac, called "Snow Leopard", has been causing some grief for some of its early adopters.

The problem reported by some users, which appears to occur only under a relatively obscure set of circumstances, is nevertheless very worrying. The situation arises when the system is configured with a "guest" login account prior to being upgraded to Snow Leopard from an earlier version of OS X.

Under these circumstances, the Snow Leopard bug simply treats the principal account like a guest account which results in that account profile being deleted when the principal user logs out.

Users who have had painful experience of this situation have first logged into a guest account and then into their normal account only to find that it has been reset to the original default settings, with none of their personal data or files visible!

A statement by Apple confirmed the bug and announced that it was working on a fix. Users who use a back up service, including Apple's own "Time Machine" could recover their data, but those who do not have irrevocably lost their data.

Until a solution is released by Apple, users are advised to delete the guest account prior to implementing an upgrade to Snow Leopard.

Please ask for assistance from May Day Consulting on 01224 697457 if you are considering an upgrade of your Apple Macs to the new Snow Leopard operating system.

## WINDOWS 7 ARRIVES... BUT...?

As we go to press, Windows Version 7 has just been released for retail sale (October 22<sup>nd</sup>).

Many IT professionals have of course been working with beta versions of the software for many months, and the general reaction has been a positive, if cautious welcome. This contrasts dramatically with the launch of Vista some 3 years ago. Since then, very few businesses have migrated to Vista, which was originally touted as the natural and urgently needed successor to Windows XP.

Some early reviews of the operating system confirm that Windows 7 is everything that Vista should have been (but was not). Application issues have been largely resolved and it works well with older hardware. A raft of new features will make it a viable option for business users to consider migrating from Windows XP in the coming years according to industry analysts.

However, on the other hand, there have been reports of some user's PCs going into a loop of activity during the upgrade (from Vista), which appears to fail, with the advice that the system will be restored to Vista. The system then reboots and produces the same error message and reboots again in an endless loop. Microsoft is reported to be struggling to determine what is causing this problem and produce a quick fix!

Microsoft has suffered severe damage over the lack of acceptance of Vista by the business community, which has been for many very good reasons. Its competitors – principally Apple, have capitalised on this and Microsoft has suffered both in terms of its reputation, and financially.

Microsoft's reputation is therefore riding high on the success of the new Windows 7, and early indications are that it has succeeded, although many would say that it is still very early to make such a judgement.

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## MAJOR CHANGES TO INTERNET DOMAIN NAMES

Many of you may have read that the authority that regulates the conventions for domain names has recently approved a major change to these conventions.

It will soon be possible to create a domain name using a number of scripts (Chinese, Arabic and many others) as well as the current Latin script.

It has been estimated that around half of the Internet users throughout the world speak languages with a non-Latin script.

This change will not only allow those countries more familiar with their own script to create domain names in that script, but also significantly extend the addressing capability of the Internet – something that has concerned the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) for some time.

As the number of domain names in use expands, the ability to create unique addresses diminishes. This change will alleviate much of this problem.

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## BROADBAND TAX

The "Digital Britain" report produced by the government recently (see previous *Understand IT* articles) suggested the implementation of a tax on fixed telephone lines in order to fund the expansion of fibre optic network to rural areas.

The government is indeed planning a tax of £6 per year on every fixed telephone line in the UK to provide the necessary funds – the so-called Final Third fund – to bring broadband to 90% of the UK population.

One detractor from this proposal is the CEO of Talk Talk. He has publicly stated that he feels that this tax is not only unfair, but will actually slow down the expansion of the fibre network. Private companies, who may have funded much of this expansion themselves, will now be dissuaded from investing, in favour of waiting for government funds to be made available.

The Talk Talk view is perhaps understandable, given that they have already invested heavily in their network and have further investment plans. The injection of public funds, which may be used to help its competitors, is possibly one reason for this position.

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## TOUCHSCREEN SMARTPHONES

We have noted that many users of smartphones have not experienced the satisfaction that they had expected with their new devices, a recent survey has revealed.

The run-away success of the iPhone has resulted in a rush by its competitors to produce devices that use touch-screens as the user interface rather than the keyboard. The manufacturers of some of these devices, in a rush to get a device into the market, simply modified an interface designed to be manipulated by a stylus, but these modifications have not always been successful.

We suggest that you thoroughly test any smartphone device that you intend purchasing before making your choice, to avoid disappointment.

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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