

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.

TECHNOLOGY SPYING ON US?

It was recently reported by the Internet rights organisation the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) that many makes of laser printer on general sale have been engineered to print identifying information on each page that the laser printer produces. This information is encoded in a series of dots that are all but invisible to the human eye. However, with a magnifying glass and details of the code, it is possible to pinpoint the exact date and time that the page was printed, and the serial number of the printer concerned.

Some may view concern about this to be paranoia, but the EFF and other organisations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) feel strongly that there could be serious implications if a printed page can be traced back to the printer that produced it and when. It claims that only the American Secret Service and the EFF currently have the ability to decipher the encoded information.

It would appear that the US government may have colluded with the printer manufacturers, ostensibly to be able to help track down counterfeiters. The question now being raised is what other innocuous technology in our homes and offices is now or will in the future be designed to spy on us?

For more information on the EFF case, visit their web site at: <http://www.eff.org/Privacy/printers/>

SKYPE SECURITY FLAWS FOUND

It was only a matter of time before the hackers found Skype as a potential tool to provide a “back door” into your computer for some nefarious purpose.

It was recently announced that a vulnerability had been found in the very popular software. Without going into rather boring technical explanations, the flaw is rather obscure, but potentially under certain circumstances, someone could gain entry to your computer and run a program without your knowledge.

If you are one of the millions of users, then our advice is to visit their web site and download the latest version, which at this time (mid November) is Version 1.4.0.84.

[Http://www.skype.com/download](http://www.skype.com/download)

The success of this free Voice Over IP (VOIP) software continues – their web site now claims almost 206 million downloads!

BROADBAND SERVICE CHECKER

We recently discovered a very useful service that might aid you to make more informed decisions about what broadband service is best for you, and which Internet Service Provider is most appropriate for your needs.

The service is provided free by Networking Links Ltd, based in Lincoln, as a good marketing tool that other companies might find interesting.

The service consists of a web site in which you enter your post code and/or telephone number. It then checks all Broadband and cable service providers and firstly confirms what services are currently available in the area concerned (for example, is the local telephone exchange equipped for ADSL or SDSL services). It then produces a list of the current packages and service costs for each option.

The site provides further information in the form of links on related subjects – for example it links to ISP Review, which provides comprehensive information on Internet Service Providers (ISPs), which makes interesting reading, a guide to ADSL and other useful help and advice on the subject of Broadband.

You can find the Broadband Checker service at:

<http://www.broadbandchecker.co.uk/>

CONTROLLING & MONITORING INSTANT MESSAGING

Instant Messaging (IM) has become popular not only for home users to communicate with friends and family, but also as a bona fide tool for business use. There are many “players” providing free facilities in this field, including Yahoo, MSN and AOL.

However, as with other forms of business communication, it is necessary to ensure that the organisation’s integrity and legal standing is not compromised by inappropriate use of these tools. The need is as much from a legal as any other standpoint, as current legislation puts considerable onus on business managers to demonstrate good governance.

In the home, there is the obvious concern about protecting children from inappropriate activity on the Internet, particularly when using IM. Monitoring and in some instances blocking the use of IM is as important to many parents as it is to business managers.

We have been looking at software solution to both home and business requirements with regard to managing the use of IM. One solution that seems to be comprehensive is produced by US organisation Deerfield. The software is called IMBRELLA and is aimed at both home and business users.

It provides facilities that are equally appropriate for either environment. It can control who can use IM on a network (which could just as easily be a small home network), the time frame within which IM can be used, how long it is used, and can even monitor and archive both sides of any or all IM conversations, a requirement in many business sectors to protect both the company and its employees.

The software is available in a modular form, so that home and business users can select the most appropriate module. Costs start from US\$49.95 for ChatChecker (principally for the home user with up to 3 PCs). Business modules are geared for larger networks and are charged on a per user licence basis.

You can find out more here:

<http://www.deerfield.com>

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF TELE-WORKING

It has been some years since the idea of working from home became a potentially realistic alternative to the daily routine of fighting traffic jams to get to the office at the pre-determined time.

Tele-working is the name coined by many in the industry to define the concept of working from home rather than in your organisation's conventional office.

The advent of a range of new technologies is making this method of working a reality for an estimated 5.5 million of us in the UK. The faster broadband internet access services, and remote networking (virtual private networking techniques that allow the office network to be extended to remote locations – like your spare bedroom cum study), are two such technologies.

However, many who are proponents of this alternative working lifestyle tend to often ignore some of the costs of tele-working. Making a business case for implementing this within an organisation, needs careful consideration of all the costs and benefits.

The following discusses some of the issues that those considering tele-working should understand before embarking on what can, and often is, a very good alternative to conventional office environments. It can provide employees with the ability to continue working when otherwise they may not be able to (mothers on maternity leave, for example).

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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Firstly, there are health and safety considerations. The onus is on the company to ensure that basic health and safety rules are also followed by employees working at home in an "extended" office environment. The Health and Safety Executive has issued guidelines on looking after remote employees (referred to by the HSE as "Homeworking"). Visit here for a copy:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf>

HSE considerations should include the safety and ergonomic design of workstations, seating, lighting and the general environment at the employee's home.

Secondly, there is the cost of providing the remote employee with computing facilities. For example, a laptop will cost 10-15% higher than an equivalent desktop. Additional resources are likely to be required in the form of upgraded or enhanced communications facilities and maybe additional server capacity to cope with remote users' requirements for access to company information. Considerations of security (firewall, anti-virus and spyware protection) must also be taken into account when providing remote working facilities.

Thirdly, there is the company information itself that will be distributed around remote workers. An organisation has a duty to protect client and other sensitive or confidential information under a variety of legislation. The possibilities for unwanted or unauthorised disclosure of information are inevitably going to be among the issues that need to be addressed.

In summary, companies considering the introduction of tele-working into their organisation should seek professional advice. They should also be aware that their responsibilities to their employees and their employees' welfare do not stop at the door of their conventional office.

SONY AND DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT (DRM)

A major furore is currently under-way following the disclosure that Sony has been producing and selling audio CDs (Compact Disks) containing software that installs itself (without your authority or knowledge) on any PC on which the disk is played.

The software is designed to inhibit any attempt to copy the music. However, it has been found that it also allows hackers to enter an "infected" PC. Sony is under enormous international pressure to withdraw this feature and recall all CDs currently in circulation.

If you are in the habit of playing music on your computer at the office, be aware of this misguided move by Sony, which is being criticised by all.

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