

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.

REMOTE ACCESS TO YOUR OFFICE OR HOME COMPUTER

Many of you will be mobile when conducting your business and need access to information that resides on your office server, or even your desktop PC in the office. In the past, this facility has only been available to larger organisations with mainframe computers and some sophisticated software. This has now changed, and assuming you have a notebook or access to a computer wherever you may be, that is running a version of Windows, then it is quite easy to establish a connection with your office or home computer.

There are a number of ways to achieve the necessary remote connection, depending on what you want to do. For example, one of the main remote access features built in to Windows XP Professional is the ability to allow remote PCs to take over and remotely operate the office PC as though you were in the office or at home.

This facility is called **Remote Desktop** and is often used by IT technical support personnel who are remote from their users. The feature lets you connect with the remote PC and use it just as though you were sitting in front of the system. In this way, a support technician can walk someone through something that they are trying to do on their computer, or fix a problem without actually visiting the user.

There are some problems with this facility, particularly if your office or home computer is behind a firewall, or LAN or WiFi router where the target PC might be allocated a dynamic IP address – that is, each time the office computer is started, an IP address is dynamically given out. This could be different every time the computer is started. An IP address is simply an Internet address, rather like a phone number that identifies your PC to the Internet. There are some ways around this problem, but it can be quite complex.

Another option for Remote Access is to use a third-party application that provides the same features as Remote Desktop, but for any version of Windows. However, the same problems of IP address resolution apply here too. An example of such an application is RealVNC (VNC stands for Virtual Network Computing). You can visit their website at the following address to find out more:

<http://www.realvnc.com>

A third option is to use a commercial subscription service that provides not only remote access to your office or home computer, but includes encryption to help protect your information.

Other advanced facilities include the ability to print remotely etc.

These “hosted” subscription services allow an organisation to set up a “virtual” network of computers that can all communicate securely with their office or home computer. The services provide all the facilities to connect the remote user(s) to their office or home computer without having to know anything about the technology. Each user is provided with an account with user ID and password and the accounts can be centrally managed. Typically the cost will be around £10-12 per PC per month, with a discount for subscribing annually. One example of a subscription service is GoToMyPC, which you can find here:

<http://www.gotomypc.com>

or LogMeIn at:

<http://www.logmein.com>

Both services offer a free trial, and the latter has a totally free service, but it lacks many of the essential facilities like the ability to transfer files between PCs for example.

If you would like to explore how you can remotely connect your PCs, then call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 for advice and assistance.

As usual, neither May Day Consulting nor Facilitators UK warrants or recommends that any of the products discussed here are fit for purpose or suitable for any specific application.

WIRELESS NETWORK SECURITY

In the July 2006 edition of **Understand IT**, we briefly touched on the subject of security when using a public “hotspot” or wireless network. Here we offer some further advice on protecting your information when using a WiFi enabled notebook in public.

By their very nature, public “hotspots” provide open public access to the Internet. They are therefore unprotected in the sense that they do not include any security or encryption, since this normally involves securing the network with “keys” or algorithms that must be entered on the notebook and verified by the network. This is something that is not possible in a network that is designed to be available to any member of the public.

The security of your data is therefore going to be at risk when using wireless networks, or indeed any public access facility, for example an Internet café.

However, there are solutions that can make your mobile computing safe and secure as if you were connected locally to your office network.

The principal solution is to use a Virtual Private Network or VPN. A VPN is a method of setting up a securely encrypted link (often referred to as a secure “tunnel”) between your computer and the Internet. There is specialist software now available that when used in conjunction with a subscription service offered by one of a number of service providers, allows a fully encrypted connection and protects your information from prying eyes.

The following three organisations provide an appropriate VPN solution that you may wish to investigate further if you are using public wireless access facilities whilst travelling:

HotSpotVPN (<http://www.hotspotvpn.com>)

PublicVPN (<http://www.publicvpn.com>)

JiWire or Ironclad WiFi (<http://www.jiwire.com>)

These services all provide a secure “tunnel” at an extremely cost-effective price of between £1 and £5 per month.

MICROSOFT OUTLOOK CONTACTS

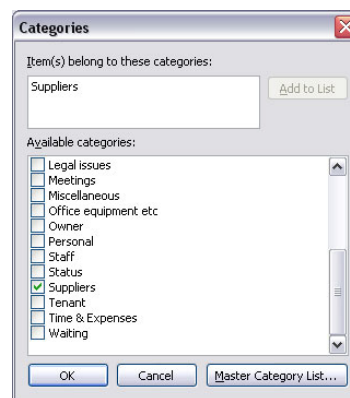
We have discussed how to use MS Outlook to maintain information about contacts in past editions of Understand IT. This month we discuss ways of customising views of your contact information.

Typically, your contacts database in Outlook will consist of one folder containing contact information for all your business, personal and other categories of people with whom you have dealings.

One way of separating the different classes of contact is to create new folders for each different type (business, personal, supplier etc.). Another way is to keep them all in one folder, but customise the view of that folder so that you display only the class of contact that you need at any particular time.

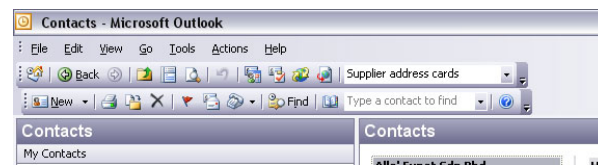
In Outlook 2003, it is then possible to list the various views of your contact database down the left-hand pane so that you can click on a particular view at any time and see the relevant sub-set of contacts immediately.

Firstly, it is necessary to apply a Category to each individual contact in your database. You do this by opening up each contact and at the bottom of the screen you will see the Category button. Clicking on this button will produce a list of built-in categories. You can select a category by checking the box against it.

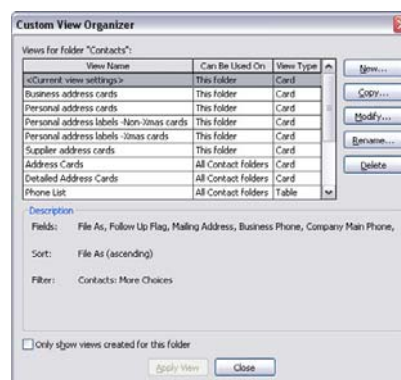


Alternatively, you can add new customised categories by hitting the Master Category List button and typing in the name of a new category, which can then be selected and applied to your contact.

The next step is to produce customized views of your Contacts database, using the Category as a filter for each view. First, click on the down arrow to the right of the “views” drop-down box (see below).



The scroll down and select DEFINE VIEWS from the drop down menu. A further dialogue box then appears:



From here, you can select an existing view by highlighting it, then modifying it, copying it, or creating a completely new view. We suggest you copy an existing view, give it a new name, then modify it. Under the modify process, you can select FILTER and MORE CHOICES, where you will find the box to identify the category of contact that you wish this particular view to filter on.

When you are finished, the new view will appear in the list of available views in the left-hand pane. You can now select which view of your database that you need.

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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