

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.

THE LEOPARD LOSES ITS SPOTS....

It has been reported that the new Apple Mac operating system, Mac OS X, codenamed "Leopard" has failed third-party firewall resistance tests.

A UK security specialist organisation Heise Security announced that even though Apple are promoting the new operating system by extolling its virtues in protecting users from security breaches, it is no where near secure in practice.

Firstly, the firewall within Leopard is disabled by default when the operating system is installed – allowing all incoming connections from the Internet. Even if the user is upgrading from a previous version of Mac OS, where the firewall was enabled and configured correctly, then the upgrade to Leopard still disables the firewall and leaves the system in an open, default condition. This sounds very similar to the situation with earlier versions of Windows XP.

Heise then applied a number of standard tests on the system, involving making connections to processes running on the system. The firewall failed all tests.

The subject of firewalls and their correct configuration is a very technical and complex subject for discussion here, which is perhaps why their set-up should generally be made much more user friendly. If you are planning to upgrade your operating system to Mac OS X Leopard, then we suggest that you enlist some technical assistance to ensure that your systems remain as secure as you would expect them to be.

Alan Finch of May Day Consulting can provide assistance if you call him on 01224 697457.

DO SME'S NEED A WEB SITE?

You may think that following the head-long rush by most businesses to create their own presence in Cyberspace over the past few years, then most reputable organisations would by now have a web site that is creating many business opportunities.

However, you would be wrong in thinking this. According to the Federation of Small Businesses, representing over 200,000 Small/Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), only around half have a web site.

The demand for new domains and web sites has begun to stagnate, which according to the FSB is short sighted, and many will lose out to their more dynamic competitors, many of whom are re-doubling their efforts in both the offline and online markets.

However, it does depend on the line of business that you are in. There are many entrepreneurs who are doing very well in their type of business without having a stake in cyberspace and have well thought-out reasons for not plunging into online markets. For many, the thought of not being able to respond to a dramatic increase in customers, and the consequent customer dissatisfaction, is not something they wish to contemplate. In such cases, it is perhaps a lack of business planning or the will and drive to expand the business, that is the problem.

Other companies, perhaps in rural areas where there is little or no "walk-in" trade, can sell their products or services nation-wide or even internationally, without needing to relocate to a more accessible position. There have been many documented cases where small "cottage" industries have grown very large, simply by having a web presence and ability to carry out online transactions.

There is no doubt that consumers are becoming more aware, and coupled with the advent of new technologies, they will become even more discerning and have more choices placed in front of them in many different forms, courtesy of the Internet.

Search engines are also becoming ever more sophisticated, often eclipsing the services of "yellow pages" (either printed or online versions) when customers are looking for a supplier or service provider for a particular purpose. The FSB's view is that to ignore the online market will result in companies losing out.

Most organisations will inevitably benefit from an online presence, even if they do not provide online transactions. Merely having a catalogue of products, services and case studies available online might be enough to persuade a potential customer to do business with them.

If you feel that your business would benefit from having a web site, we would suggest that fundamental to its success is an appraisal of the benefits and potential pitfalls to the business of launching into cyberspace.

May Day Consulting has a number of resources available who are experienced in helping with business planning, analysis of business potential and technology solutions. They can ensure that any online business expansion is carried out with a clear vision of where the business is going and that the potential opportunities and threats are recognised. Call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 for help.

DO YOU NEED A FIXED TELEPHONE LINE ANY LONGER?

The European Commission's internal statistical unit recently published an interesting report on the use of mobile telephony to replace conventional fixed line telephone services.

The report indicated that around one fifth of telephone subscribers in Europe as a whole now no longer use fixed line telephones in favour of mobile telephones.

As you might expect, two of the east European nations head the list (Lithuania (48%) and the Czech Republic (42%)). This can be explained largely because the penetration of conventional phone lines was very low anyway, and their first or only available phone line might be a mobile. The switch to mobile phones only is therefore a natural choice.

However, in the more developed west European nations the percentage is still very high, with Portugal (38%) and Belgium (24%) being the next highest.

The UK, where fixed line penetration has always been very high, now has 13% of households who only have a mobile phone line.

This is despite the increased competition for fixed line services (and their cost) in the open market that we have here in the UK. It also indicates that mobile phone call costs are also reducing in real terms, although we would hold that there is still a long way to go!

WIRELESS INTERNET ACCESS - WiMAX - THE NEXT STEP

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) recently approved the use of parts of the 3G radio spectrum (that used by mobile telephone services for high-speed data transmission) for use by other wireless data transmission services.

This seemingly small step will now allow this part of the spectrum to be used for high-speed wireless networking (WiMAX) to be made widely available.

WiMAX stands for **Worldwide Inter-operability for Microwave Access** and is the new technology which will function in a similar way to WiFi, but it can provide much faster transmission speeds and over much greater distances.

WiFi networking has become common in many small businesses and residential networks. It frees the users from fixed connection points for accessing the Internet and has significantly improved the capabilities of mobile Internet access.

WiFi can currently only transmit information at around 54Mbps (Millions of Bits Per Second), and only over a distance of around 30 metres.

WiMAX on the other hand will have a range of around 50Km and support data transmission at up to 70Mbps.

Trials of WiMAX services are already under way in Milton Keynes and Manchester, and it is only a matter of time before hardware capable of connecting devices to a WiMAX service become readily available, albeit at a cost. As in the case of WiFi, it will take off in a big way when the infrastructure is in place, but more importantly when chip manufacturers like Intel start including it within the processing chip on laptop computers for example.

When this service becomes available, and with the range it is offering, it will compete directly with fixed line ADSL (Asynchronous Digital Subscriber Line) or SDSL (Synchronous Digital Subscriber Line) broadband services. Pricing of services is not yet available, but as soon as trials are completed and the networks are in place, commercial services will begin – probably within the next 12 months.

WINDOWS VISTA – CONFLICTING DRIVE LETTERS

A client recently enlisted our help because he had purchased a “thumb” or “pen” drive (a memory chip that acts like an external hard disk drive). On inserting the USB thumb drive into his computer, the drive did not appear within the disk and folder structure under Windows Explorer as he had expected.

On investigation, our technician discovered that the drive letter that the system had automatically allocated to the new thumb drive conflicted with a network disk drive (one located on another system on the network) that had previously been connected to his system.

To correct this conflict is easy, as follows:

1. Go to **CONTROL PANEL** and select the **ADMINISTRATIVE TOOLS** icon, then select **COMPUTER MANAGEMENT** from the list of components.
2. Under **STORAGE** in the left hand pane of the window, double-click on **DISK MANAGEMENT**. This will display a graphic of all your disks and their assigned letters.
3. Now right-click on the conflicting drive and select **CHANGE DRIVE LETTER AND PATHS**. Select **CHANGE** and a new drive letter from the drop down list – make sure it does not conflict with any other drive. Click **OK** and your drive will have a new letter.

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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