

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.

UNDERSTAND IT – NOW HAS ITS OWN WEB SITE

As the year draws to a close, we at May Day Consulting can announce that we have been working hard on a new web site, devoted entirely to the *Understand IT* newsletter. This widely-read and respected newsletter has been published regularly since 1995. We have often been asked for copies of back editions, so we decided to make them available online.

The site offers the facility to download the latest copy of the newsletter (in Adobe© PDF format), and the editions for the past 12 months (also in PDF format).

It also offers the facility to list articles by either date or in alphabetical order of the title. In addition, a more comprehensive search of the database of individual articles will retrieve any article on any subject by just entering some keywords.

The site database will eventually contain every article ever published in *Understand IT* since its inception in late 1995. We have already loaded articles back to 1999 and the remaining archived articles will be added over the coming few weeks.

Finally, if you register via the site (it is totally free), you can receive your own personal copy of *Understand IT* as soon as it is published, together with topical news and offers designed to help small businesses.

To take a tour of the new site, go here:

<http://www.understand-it.co.uk>

For any further information or assistance, please call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457.

SKYPE

An enterprising Luxembourg company has developed a computer program that enables a user to make telephone calls, exchange instant messages and data files via a PC and an Internet connection.

The software is free, provides an intuitive interface and is proving extremely popular. It is estimated that over 40 million copies of the software have been downloaded within the past year, and with recent publicity, it is expected that this will increase significantly.

For more information, and to download your copy, visit:

<http://www.skype.com>

INTERNET TELEPHONY

The technology that allows you to communicate verbally via an Internet connection has been available for some time. It has been used very successfully by many instant messaging systems, for example MSN Messenger and Yahoo Messenger. The attraction is that it allows you to talk to your correspondents anywhere in the world for free (over and above the cost of your normal connection to the Internet, which in the case of broadband services is usually a fixed cost).

This technology converts the spoken word into data bits (a series of zeros and ones) and “packages” the data so that it can be transmitted via the Internet in the same way as any other kind of data.

In the past, the problem with using the technology has been one of quality, caused by the delays in receiving the voice-encoded data. However, with the increasing use of broadband services, the quality has improved considerably and the quality of connections is now comparable to conventional telephone services.

Internet telephony, also referred to as Voice Over IP (VOIP), has for some time been used by large businesses to communicate internally using telephone systems (PABXs) that use the same technology. The advantages of this are many, since it also allows their voice communications to be totally integrated with their Local Area Network (LAN) infrastructure. This, in turn provides for the delivery of voice communication internally within the organisation via the desktop PC and the treatment of telephone calls in much the same way as electronic mail.

For external voice communication, the technology is becoming even more widely used by commercial telephone service providers, enabling them to offer reduced cost calls to any location in the world.

This technology is now set to be extended further by the availability of IP (Internet Protocol) telephone instruments aimed at small businesses and home users.

A Danish company (RTX) recently announced the availability of a new cordless telephone that can be connected directly either to a conventional telephone line, or more importantly to your PC, enabling you to make international telephone calls via your existing Internet connection. The device is designed to work with an Internet Telephony computer program called SKYPE (see separate article).

Siemens and Cisco are both also working on telephones that will provide the same functionality.

COUNTERFEIT WINDOWS XP EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Microsoft has begun a trial program for tracking down and dealing with pirates who copy their Windows XP operating system software. Initially, the trial is available only in the UK, and will last until the end of this month (December). However, it is expected that if it is successful, it will be extended, and almost certainly introduced in other countries where Microsoft know that piracy of their software is a major problem.

The program offers to exchange pirate copies of Windows XP for genuine copies, in return for assistance in tracking down where the counterfeit copies originated. In order to qualify for an exchange, the user (who may know, or perhaps suspect that their copy is not genuine), will be required to submit the software CD to Microsoft, together with a "witness statement" detailing the circumstances under which they purchased the software, and copies of any sales receipt or invoice.

The effort is principally aimed at situations where computer hardware has been purchased (prior to November 1, 2004) with a copy of Windows XP pre-installed by the supplier.

Microsoft will determine whether the product is in fact counterfeit and if so, will exchange it for a genuine copy. They will then take action against those who supplied the software, where appropriate.

For further information on the program, visit the Microsoft site at this address:

<http://www.microsoft.com/uk/piracy/genuine/check-authenticity/verification/default.msp>

END OF THE ROAD FOR WINDOWS NT SERVER AND EXCHANGE SERVER 5.5 SUPPORT

Microsoft has confirmed that it will withdraw support for their Windows NT 4.0 Server operating system with effect from the end of December.

This should not be news to companies who have been using this very successful server operating system. The withdrawal of support was announced nearly 2 years ago. If you are still using NT version 4.0, then in future it will not be supported or updated to guard against security flaws.

Microsoft recommends that users migrate to the Windows Server 2003, and are offering a "paid-for" support service to assist companies wishing to upgrade.

Microsoft has also announced the withdrawal of support for their electronic mail server product Exchange Server Version 5.5.

It will cease to be supported with effect from January 1, 2006. From this date, only customer paid support service will be available, and this will cease finally in December 2007. The upgrade path for those still using Exchange Server 5.5 is to migrate to Exchange Server 2003.

If your organisation is still using either of these products and need further advice and assistance, please call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457.

E-MAIL SPAMMERS WIN FIGHT WITH LYCOS

Lycos, the Internet web search company recently made a controversial decision to engage in a retaliatory fight with spammers, but this week, they hoisted the white flag and surrendered!

Lycos produced a screensaver that when active, sent small information requests to a small number of notorious and well-known spam-producing web sites. The intention was to create a dramatic increase in requests for information that it would slow down the spammers' servers, but perhaps more importantly cost them money, since most of them pay their ISP charges according to the amount of data flowing to and from their sites.

Lycos designed the screensaver so that it routed the information requests via their own central server, allowing them to control the volume and thus the effect that the attack was having. They further claimed that they would not cause any of the spammers' servers to become over-loaded and fail.

However, it was always going to be a controversial step to take, since in effect Lycos was mounting a Denial of Service (DoS) attack, which is illegal in many countries.

Over 100,000 copies of the screensaver were downloaded in just one month, and it proved successful. Monitoring of the target servers indicated that in fact, some were actually brought down by Lycos action. Predictably, the spammers retaliated by mounting their own attack, which brought down some of Lycos' services.

Many in the IT industry criticised Lycos for their action, but it has gained much support from spam-weary users who are heartily sick of dealing with the growing mountain of unsolicited e-mail. A brave attempt, but maybe a little mis-guided!

We wish to acknowledge with thanks that some of the material contained within this publication has been sourced from Computer Weekly.

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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