

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.



HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR....

Another very busy year has passed, and the challenges we face in ensuring the effectiveness and security of our Information and Communications Technology remain as important as they were this time last year.

Despite much of the negative impact on our businesses that we have had to endure, the advantages and positive benefits of technology to businesses, large and small, is overwhelming. In a business environment that many would rightly say is top-heavy with legislative pressure, technology continues to provide the core support infrastructure to enable employees and business managers to develop new business opportunities, streamline business processes and improve productivity.

We at May Day Consulting and colleagues at Facilitators UK continue to provide what we believe are crucial, value-added services to our growing portfolio of clients. We would like to take this opportunity to wish our existing, and potential new clients a very happy Christmas, and may 2006 prove to be even more rewarding and prosperous for us all.



SONY AND DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT (DRM) - 2

In a follow-up to the brief mention of this subject in last month's edition, there has been much adverse publicity heaped on Sony by almost everyone in what has proven to be a publicity disaster for the company.

In a mis-guided attempt to prevent piracy of their audio CDs, Sony BMG decided to place copy protection software on a significant number of their newly issued music CD titles. When these CDs were played on a personal computer, the software copied itself onto the user's hard disk and installed itself (without the user's knowledge or authority), preventing the computer from being used to copy that CD.

Two different third-party companies provided the copy protection software to Sony BMG as part of a trial. Apart from rather under-hand methods used by Sony, it was subsequently discovered that the software provided by one of the companies made critical changes to the Microsoft Operating System software and could not be uninstalled without sustaining damage to the operating system.

The software provided by the second company could be removed, and following pressure after its discovery, Sony issued a small program that users could download and which was designed to remove the offending software. However, this was insufficiently tested, and had a flaw in it which could potentially allow hackers to gain unauthorised access to the user's computer. In some cases it also caused computers to malfunction and totally inhibit the use of the CD drive.

Apart from the poor way that this method of trying to prevent piracy was implemented; by installing software in this way (without the authority of the user), it has been held to breach legislation in many countries relating to the misuse of computing facilities. It has been likened to the virus techniques used by hackers to gain control of computers by using Trojans.

A number of class legal actions have now been commenced against Sony, which seek recompense for damage sustain to computer systems by their software.

Sony has finally agreed to withdraw all copies of the albums in which this copy protection software was included and to thoroughly re-evaluate its approach to piracy prevention. However, it stresses that it reserves its rights to protect its assets from piracy.



CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM)

It has always been said that the customer is king. This has never been more true than today. Even companies with impressive and slick marketing and publicity machines can fall foul of their customers very easily.

Witness two unrelated incidents recently – firstly the debacle over Sony BMG's approach to Digital Rights Management (see earlier article in this edition). Then the much publicised problems with the latest generation of Apple's Ipod Nano digital music player. Both of these instances serve to demonstrate that the old saying can be ignored at your peril.

The Internet, as in other areas, has been a major enabler for customers in giving them more power and choice in selecting and returning to favoured suppliers of goods and services. With just a few clicks of a mouse, a potential customer can search, browse, compare and purchase goods without leaving his or her chair. Weblogs (blogs) are now everywhere, and discussion forums available on just about any subject that you care to think of, all available for customers to exchange experiences.

Poor management of your customers can now very quickly become an internationally visible disaster for unwary businesses.

Naturally, to meet this challenge, there are many companies producing solutions to ensure that you can manage your existing, and develop relationships with new customers. Tracking of all business dealings with customers is essential to ensure that the left and right hands are constantly in communication.

If you feel that your customer relationships are not as they should be, contact Alan Finch on 01224 697457 for advice on improving your CRM skills.



DAYS OF THE HARD DRIVE NUMBERED?

Samsung, the Korean electronics company recently stated its view that the days of the computer hard disk drive are now numbered.

It announced the general availability of a new computer chip containing 16.4 billion transistors. A 32Gb (gigabyte) memory card built from these chips is capable of holding 8,000 MP3 audio files or 32 hours of DVD quality video.

Whilst this level of capacity is suitable for portable audio or even video players, Samsung speculates that with this type of solid state memory doubling in capacity every 12 months, 128Gb memory chips will be available within 2 years. This would make it suitable for use in laptop or desktop computers and in time, even servers.



MS OUTLOOK CONTACTS AND MAIL-MERGE

You may be familiar with the full-feature mail-merge facility within Microsoft Word, which can be used for producing form letters, mailing labels etc. However, you may not be aware that Microsoft Outlook has a matching feature that will allow you to use the contact database within it to provide the mail-merge data.

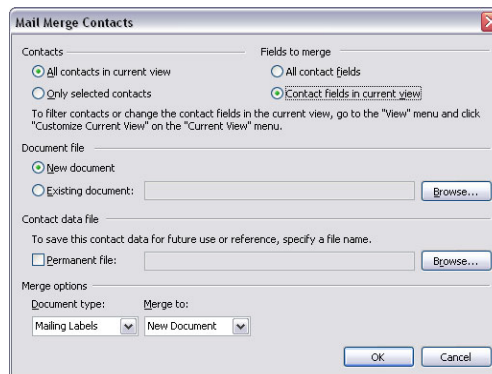
If you do not currently use the Outlook Contacts database to maintain details of your correspondents, then it is worth investigation.

One of the useful features of the Outlook Contacts database is that you can create additional databases of contact information, or more sensibly use the customisation feature together with filters to create different views of the same database.

Assigning a different category(ies) to contacts is a useful way of filtering contacts into groups. Filters allow you to see only those contacts that you wish to see. These “views” of the database can be customised to include only those fields that you want and each view can be stored with a separate name.

In order to use the Outlook Contacts database for mail-merge purposes, it is easier (but not essential) if you first create a view of the database containing only the records and fields that you want to include in the mail-merge.

Once you have done this, you just select TOOLS from the Outlook menu, and MAILMERGE. The following dialogue box will appear:



From this box, you can select the options that you need to create the data table that will populate the mailmerge document within MS Word. In this example, all contacts in the current view will be used, and only the fields shown in the current view will be used (this is why it is easier to filter and customise the view first). The mailing labels option has also been selected.

Having selected your preferred options, hit OK and MS Word will be launched automatically together with the Mail Merge Helper dialogue



You can then complete the mail merge using the data provided by the Contacts database.

If you require assistance in setting up mail merge using MS Word and/or the Contacts database, then please call Alan Finch on (01224) 697457.

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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