

# 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.



## MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR



Yet another year draws to a close – a year that has seen significant global turmoil in financial markets and its effect on businesses both large and small.

Hopefully 2011 will see an improvement in the economy and its knock-on effect on businesses, particularly SMEs who historically have always been able to recover from recession faster.

All of us involved in creating, editing, proofing and publishing *Understand IT* hope that you had a great Christmas, and would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very healthy and prosperous 2011.

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### PRIVATE BROWSING NOT SO PRIVATE?

It would seem that Phorm is not the only organisation that is trying hard to monitor what web sites we visit in order to gain some business benefit.

You may remember the controversy surrounding the activities of Phorm over the past couple of years – we have briefed readers of the developments in a number of previous editions of *Understand IT*.

As a reminder, Phorm has developed a protocol allowing ISPs to monitor the web sites that we visit and using this information to present us with “more relevant” advertising material.

The process is called targeted marketing, but it has fallen foul of those responsible for protecting our privacy, even though Phorm claim that no personally identifiable information is recorded by them.

Now, on a slightly different level, the BBC has recently published an article that claims that some unscrupulous web sites have begun using clever pieces of software to determine what sites each of us have visited. The BBC disclosure is based on research carried out by University College, San Diego in California.

According to the research, “...The bug exploits the way that many browsers handle links people have visited. Many change the colour of the text to reflect that earlier visit.

This can be abused with a specially written chunk of code sitting on a website that interrogates a visitor’s browser to see what it does to a given list of websites. Any displayed in a different colour are judged to be those a user has already seen.

A survey of 50,000 of the web’s most visited websites by the team from UC San Diego found 485 sites using this method to get at browser histories, 63 were copying the data it reveals and 46 were found to be “hijacking” a user’s history.

The most popular sites that use the technique are of course of the “adult” variety. Many other sites use it too, including sports, news, movies and finance.

The researchers also looked at other popular techniques that sites use to map and monitor what visitors do. Some, such as YouTube, run scripts that track the trail a user’s mouse pointer takes on and across pages.

“Our study shows that popular Web 2.0 applications like mashups, aggregators, and sophisticated ad targeting are rife with different kinds of privacy-violating flows,” wrote the researchers.

The researchers pointed out that some modern browsers, such as Google’s Chrome and Apple’s Safari, are not vulnerable to history hijacking and that the most recent version of Mozilla has closed the loophole. Users of Internet Explorer can defeat the bug by turning on “private browsing”.

If you feel that the version of the browser that you are using maybe vulnerable to “harvesting” of information as described above, then please call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 for advice.

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### INTERNET EXPLORER 9 – ADVANCED PRIVACY FEATURES

As a timely follow up to the previous article, it has just been announced that the next version of Microsoft’s Internet Explorer – Version 9 will include even more advanced features enabling users to control what data is collected about their online activities.

A new “opt-in” activity tracking system will let users identify, track and block any undesirable web sites that track their activity online.

How efficient and effective these new features will be remains to be seen.

The new version of IE is scheduled for release early in 2011.

## SOCIAL NETWORKING – A MUST FOR THE SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

Many business managers have in the past scoffed at the use of social networking within their business environment. They have too often concentrated on the negative perception that for their staff to spend their time communicating via Facebook or MySpace is unproductive and a distraction from their core function.

Some of these concerns are perhaps valid, although are manageable. On the other hand, for the astute business, use of social media is now becoming a necessity in the effort to offer a unique selling point or simply just to compete in an increasingly competitive market place.

More and more businesses are recognising the necessity of maintaining a high profile online presence in order to monitor discussion fora, social networking sites and other online portals in order to keep their finger on the pulse of customer satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their own or indeed their competitors' products.

Customers for their part are now much more informed, and are increasingly using these online opportunities to help them determine the best deals around or to exchange experiences almost in real time with others in the purchase, practical use, or general satisfaction with just about any product.

Just as any other development in your business model, it is essential that you assess the most appropriate ways of improving interaction with existing and potential customers.

May Day Consulting and/or Facilitators International LLP are able to offer a unique blend of services to assist your business to expand. Please call Alan Finch on 01224 697457 if you feel that you need assistance in any of these areas.

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## CLOUD COMPUTING – A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

Following up our discussions on Cloud Computing, this month we cover some of the legal implications in using these services.

Firstly, it is probably necessary to expand on the types of cloud computing services being offered to businesses, both large and small. These services fall broadly into two categories – provision of a hardware infrastructure (telecommunications, servers etc) – referred to as 'Infrastructure as a Service' (IaaS), and provision of applications residing on shared hardware – referred to as 'Software as a Service' (SaaS).

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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The type of service appropriate for any business will depend on their business requirements but may be a mix of both types of service.

The legal considerations that should be assessed when using any cloud computing service include:

### Security.

How secure is your corporate data, housed as it will be on hardware in a remote location, accessed over telecommunications services and under the direct control of your service provider?

They may provide back-up and restore facilities and protection from hacking. However, what about the legal jurisdiction over the information they hold. This will depend largely on where the data resides – is it in your own country or another country where the local legal jurisdiction may be more strictly defined or alternatively, less protected.

For example, there have been cases where the "digital assets" of suspected criminals have been seized by local law enforcement agencies, including the hardware on which any information assets reside. Such hardware assets will almost certainly be shared with one or many other cloud computing customers. Your organisation could therefore suffer significantly from having information seized. Local legal protection may not be available under such circumstances.

### Right of Access

In many jurisdictions, local law enforcement agencies have the power to access and view your information and may also have the power to place a "gag" order on the service provider so that you may not even know that your information has been viewed.

It would be wise to discuss these concerns with the provider and perhaps contractually bind the supplier to storing your data in a jurisdiction of your choice.

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## A NEW TREND – IN-SOURCING

In a reversal of the strategy of many large organisations to outsource what are seen as non-core business processes, Standard Life, the Scottish based life assurance company has recently completed the take-over of software company Focus Solutions for a reported sum of £42 million.

The purpose in this purchase and integration of their IT supplier is for the software company to help them develop their insurance offerings to customers and intermediaries. This trend follows the take-over of Millennium IT in 2009 by the London Stock Exchange, and indicates the importance placed on IT by some large organisations.

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