

Radio Days – 2011-11-12

Tip of the Week – Computers Behaving Badly

Two clients this week had interesting problems. The first could not use the website of one of the TV channels to view past episodes of shows which he liked. The message that he saw said that he was not in Australia! I only had to glare at the computer for a few minutes before it allowed him to view his program.

Another client's computer had a similar problem: it had a 64-bit version of Windows and a program which had been working for six months suddenly decided not to work. Apparently this program was unstable under Windows 7/64 so an upgrade to the latest version of the program solved everything.

I still do not know what or why, and I am sure that I am going to have nightmares about these problems for at least a week! It is possible, in at least one case, that the problem was caused by a power surge. In my last job as an employee, in telephone technical support at MYOB, I was the person who repaired all the MYOB data files which were sent in with problems. While I could not always find out what has caused the damage to a data file, when I could find the problem it was always a failure to supply clean electricity to the computer. This may have been the cause in these two examples of computers behaving badly.

Cloud Computing

Many people are familiar with cloud computing, even if they do not know the term. If you have an email account with a provider like Gmail or Hotmail you will know that you access your account using a web browser. You can also access a Gmail account with any normal email program and your Hotmail account with a Microsoft program like Windows Live Mail.

Cloud computing, according to some commentators, will take the world by storm and ensure that Microsoft, with its expensive word processors, will bite the dust and become a forgotten child of the Eighties. While cloud computing has some place, I firmly believe that Microsoft will weather the storm and still sell software by the bucket load.

Free Office Applications

There are many free cloud-based word processors, spreadsheets and other office programs. The fact that there are so many means that many people are convinced that this is the way of the future. My take on all this is that there are two problems to be overcome before the cloud blinds us all with madness. These two problems are:

- The inability of these free cloud programs to provide more than very basic operations. You cannot, with Google Docs for instance, do things which I take for granted each week when I prepare these cheat sheets for my weekly radio programs. I can change the look of the headings in this document, for example, so that they are obviously headings. This is either very restricted or impossible using Google Docs.
- These programs store all your data in the cloud. The reasoning behind this is that you can then access them from anywhere, from any computer with internet access. You can also collaborate with your colleagues on any document, and all work on this document at the same time. I have enough trouble when supporting a client over the internet with knowing who has control of the mouse and keyboard; I do not want to be fighting over the placement of a comma or apostrophe in two places at once.

To my way of thinking this is yet another technological solution in search of a problem. Perhaps I am an old fuddy-duddy and we will all be working this way next year (did you know that 2012 is meant to be the *Year of the Cloud?*): please let history pass me by on this one.

Some years ago I saw an advertisement for home-delivered pizzas. I stated that this was just a passing fad and that it would blow over in six months. Some twenty years later delivered pizzas are the convenience meal of choice for many people. Will I be wrong yet again?

Office Applications for Money

Did you know that Microsoft has entered the cloud arena? This implies that I have made a major mistake with my prediction that cloud computing is a flash in the pan. I still like to have control over my data, not leaving it to the vagaries of a website which may be located anywhere in the world and at the mercies of any jurisdiction which cares to demand to see my data. There is no option, that I can find, to protect data with a password to limit access to those who have the right (which, in my opinion, is mine to give and withhold).

There is also one matter which really frightens me: the ability of organisations to deny access to people with no right of reply. Two celebrated cases spring to mind. The first involves a man denied access to his Google account for some unspecified reason. He had no recourse and lost all his data: contacts, documents, emails and everything.

The second matter is, perhaps, laughable if you are that sort of person. A person named Kate Middleton had an account with Facebook and used it for communicating with her Facebook friends. Then another person named Kate Middleton married a prince in England so the first Kate Middleton had her Facebook account frozen because she had obviously impersonated the real Kate Middleton (who was now a princess!).

Perhaps we could remove all this sort of confusion if we were given a unique number at birth, perhaps enforced with a microchip. Big Brother: here we come.

Another Option

There is, of course, another option: download a free program to do the word processing or other task which you need. There are too many free and very low cost office programs for me to name any. If you are interested in finding out what is on the market just do an internet search for *free word processor* or *free office program*. If you have not done this search you will be surprised by the wealth of programs which are provided free for your use.

You may spend a lifetime trying them all out, or you may search for recommendations on the internet or through your friends. Whatever you do, there is sure to be a free or low cost program that does what you want. The other, obvious, option is to pay for a copy of the standard programs provided by Microsoft.

As they say: you pays your money and you takes your choice.

Conclusion

Perhaps, by now, you have received the impression that I believe that online processing is not a good idea? If so, you are quite correct.

I shall stick to keeping all my photos and documents on my computer with regular backups to keep everything safe. I see this trend as an excellent example of people trying to solve a problem which does not yet exist for their gain, not for our convenience.

Include me out!

Further Information

None this week