

Radio Days – 2012-06-30

Tip of the Week – Tech Support Not Working

There were two occasions during the week when I had problems with things not working.

Email Setup

The first occasion was when a new client rang to ask me to get her emails working. She had asked another person to setup her email program on her new computer and her emails had not come through since then. In my absolute confidence I stated that I could do this for her.

I had not reckoned on a well-known ISP changing its email setup for new clients. Once I had checked with the ISP's website for the email settings I discovered that the settings had been completely revised. This meant that I had to revise all my previous knowledge.

Using the settings on the website I tried to access her emails. This did not work! After a few more attempts it was time to call in the expert: the person at the end of the phone. The expert also had problems. His training had not equipped him for this problem so he asked me to let him access my client's computer. He made some changes, but I had to show him the website with the settings for him to get anywhere near the right settings — and these were the settings that I had started with!

After a lucky guess I managed to send and receive emails. This allowed me to give him a *Poor* rating and also giving the ISP a *Poor* rating for having incorrect information on its website. This is the sort of information which any part-way competent computer person uses to set up emailing for a friend or client, so it should be completely accurate.

Such are the vicissitudes of life!

Internet Banking

The second occasion was when a client could not get onto his internet banking site. The rest of the internet was working perfectly but his bank's website gave a general error stating that he could not access his account. This was most frustrating as, like most business owners, he needed to be able to access his bank's website for all his banking needs.

Because I bank with another bank I checked my internet banking with a completely different result. Fortunately my bank had a well-designed website with a much better error message. The error message stated that cookies needed to be enabled in my web browser for the bank's website to work. This was simple to fix, and the result was that my client could now access his bank's website.

Helpful error messages are a joy to behold!

What is a Cookie?

Cookies are small files which websites can place on your computer. They are used in many ways by many websites. They are most useful when a website expects a number of pages to be displayed and the results from one page will determine the result of the next page. This is the behaviour expected both from banking websites and from ecommerce websites.

Both of these types of websites need to know who is sending the information so that, for example, you get the balance of your account rather than the balance of somebody else's account.

Many people fear cookies, perhaps because they do not understand what they are and how they work. If you are one of these people I hope that this information has helped you become able to accept cookies as the useful parts of computing which we all love so much.

Permanent Email Address

Recently I talked about changing ISP. One of the consequences of this change is that you lose the email address which ties you to your ISP. This can be a major problem for many people so, for those people, I suggest that you get a permanent email address which you can take with you whoever is your ISP. This is akin to having a permanent telephone number on your mobile phone: when you get a new mobile phone you just put your SIM into your new phone and your old number is still there. This means that you will never lose a friend again.

There are two sorts of personal and portable email addresses.

Web-based Email

There are many companies which provide free web-based email accounts. A quick search for *free email* located over 4,500,000,000 hits: far too many to search in one lifetime. Perhaps one of the best results purports to show the top twenty free email websites. This, perhaps, should be your first port of call.

The advantage of web-based email accounts is that you can access them from anywhere in the world with internet access. My smartphone will also access my web-based email, though all the emails are in a small font so can be difficult to read. Accessing them on a computer or tablet is excellent.

Web-based email accounts are excellent for people who do not want to be tied to an ISP. They are easy to use and flexible. They can often be useful because they often come with plenty of online storage. The downside is that they often come with advertisements to help pay for the service.

One disadvantage of web-based email accounts is that you cannot prepare an email unless you are connected to the internet. There are many times when it can be useful to write an email before connecting and sending the result. If you can live without this feature then a web-based email account can, perhaps, be the one for you.

Personal Email Address

There is another type of email address which you can setup just for yourself or, perhaps, for your business or family as well. Web-based email accounts are free both to create and to use, but if you have your own domain name there will be a cost associated with creating and using your domain name and then there is the monthly or yearly cost of leasing space on a server. These costs are quite low: typically you can register a domain name (eg *tobybainbridge.com*) for between \$10 and \$80 per year, usually for a minimum of two years. Then there is the cost of hosting your email servers. The price for this can vary from \$30 per year to \$300 per year.

There are some who would say that this cost is too high. There are some who say that the cost is small compared to the advantage of having a profession-looking email address. I have seen far too many business cards which have a website address but have an email address like pete@hotmail.com: this shows that you (or your web consultant) do not understand how to promote a professional image.

Please remember that, if you have a website, email comes as standard. This is part of the way that the web works, but too many people do not take advantage of the email addresses which can come with their website. All website hosting packages can provide email addresses: up to five even for low-cost webhosting packages. This makes it very easy to have email addresses like info@yourwebsite.com.au: a much more professional approach.

Advantages of Freedom

This freedom from being tied to your ISP can make your life easier. You have the option of moving at any time to better or cheaper internet access than your current ISP provides. The world of the internet is competitive and you can take advantage of this competitiveness. It may mean a little work to check a few email- or web-hosting packages, and some more work

to check the plans available from some ISPs, but the savings and peace of mind can be quite remarkable!

People are now becoming more used to changing providers, whether it is changing from one telco to another or from one bank to another now that the government has made the banks drop their exit fees. This freedom is what we are now coming to expect, and those businesses which attempt to tie you to their apron strings are bound to fail in the long run.

Just as a jealous partner can give you a sense of being caught in a trap, so an ISP which does its best to trap you as a customer for ever is going to invite a backlash. This is the position which I find myself in, and it is the position from which I am determined to escape. This takes some planning, but it will be worth it in the end.

Letting All Your Email Contacts Know Your New Address

Congratulations! You now have your new email address!

The next problem is letting all your email contacts know your new email address. This, like so many other things, is easier in theory than in practice. The first step is to send an email to all your contacts. I suggest, for privacy reasons, that you send an email to yourself and include all your contacts as a *BCC*. *BCC* stands for *Blind Carbon Copy* and means that nobody who gets your email can see the address of any of the other people who will get the email. This will also greatly reduce the chance of getting any spam emails if one or more of your contacts has a compromised computer.

I suggest that you monitor your old email address for a short while just in case somebody on your email list does not know how to change your email address in their email program or website. There are still people who cannot do this task so you will need to be patient with them. Often a phone call will help them (if you know how to make the change) but, if the worst happens, you will have to drop them after your old email address expires.

This can be a painful process. People do not like to be dropped, but sometimes it is necessary if they cannot help themselves or get local help. It may not be feasible to fly to the other side of the world just to show a friend (or even a grandparent like myself!) how to change your email address in their email program!

May all your emails in this new freedom paradise be happy ones!

Further Information

Free email addresses www.email.about.com
www.google.com/mail
www.mail.com