

# Radio Days – 2012-12-01

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## *Discussion – Fifteen Years in Maryborough*

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I moved to Maryborough on Sunday 30 November 1997. This is the first Saturday after my fifteenth anniversary so I am taking the time to reflect on what I have learnt over these years.

I have typed out the headings of the topics that I want to cover today and, looking at their contents, I am reminded of a book that I read many years ago. It was written by a Canadian psychiatrist who was remarking on how people reacted to a known impending disaster. He talked about people who had glaucoma. Glaucoma is a disease of the eye which, if untreated, leads inevitably to blindness, usually in both eyes. He remarked that many people would stop the treatment (which involves drops in both eyes two, three or four times a day) far too early. Because glaucoma is a lifetime disease these drops usually need to be put in the eye for the rest of a person's life. Often the person would stop putting drops in their eyes, and refuse to continue using drops even after they had gone blind in one eye.

I see this sort of behaviour in many of my clients, and wonder what I can do to prevent this disease from spreading to more people in the world.

Here is the list of some of the common reasons why I am called to see a client.

### *People Do Not Read The Screen*

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A message appears on the screen. The computer stops until the user responds to the message, so the programmers feel that it must be important for the user to read and understand what the message is all about. The user presses *Enter* or clicks on *OK* to remove the message and it disappears. This means that the world is no longer going to end.

The user's next step often to repeat these actions until frustration sets in. Computers are very good at repeating actions, so much so that people can sometimes learn that repeating any action more than once will only lead to more and more frustration.

Yes, reading the message on the screen can be painful: it often means stopping what you are doing and thinking about what the message says and means. This sort of pain seems to be too much for too many people to endure. Perhaps we should start teaching people how to think when they are still young enough that the thinking pain has not yet set in!

**Tip:** Reading the screen before clicking on the *OK* button can save a lot of frustration!

### *People Do Not Do Backups*

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I was recently called to see a client because his MYOB invoice layout had been lost during the process of repairing the damage done by a virus. During this process all the data from the old hard disc had been stored in a folder which was not obviously present but which held the secret to recovering his invoice layout. If he had had a backup of his invoice layout then the recovery would have been much quicker and easier.

I will not mention the client who rang after Easter one year to report that their computer had been stolen during the break, and they asked me to reinstall all the programs which they used then restore all their data. Their last backup was some weeks before so they had to re-enter all the data since their last backup. Once they had re-entered all their data I did a backup and saved it to a CD. This was then set aside.

Some weeks later I got a call from this same client asking me to reinstall all their programs and restore all their data because their computer had been stolen during the weekend. Again their most recent backup was the one which I had done some weeks before. Again, they had to re-enter all their data and, again, I did a backup to a CD and set it aside in a safe place. Again, I received a call a few weeks later to ask me to reinstall all their programs and to restore all their data from the old backup. Again they had to re-enter all the missing data to get back to where they had been before the weekend.

After this they put locks on the doors.

There are a number of ways to do a backup. Some of them are very easy to do and do not take much time, others are automatic but may cost a few dollars a year. There are a number of free programs which will backup your data onto an external device (either USB stick or external USB hard disc) and a number of free online backup systems.

One client did not want to remember to do backups so I created a system which compressed his files and protected them with a strong password then copied them to his Dropbox folder automatically at set time intervals. Dropbox then copied these files to the cloud if they had changed. This was the simplest way of doing a backup.

The only potential problem with this method of doing a backup was that his upload speed was fairly slow so to copy 2 GB of data to the cloud would take about a week for the initial load. Apart from this restriction the method worked like a charm.

**Tip:** Please ensure that you have a working backup system in place.

### *People Do Not Upgrade Their Programs*

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Many virus attacks occur because people do not update the programs on their computers. Most, if not all, of these attacks could have been prevented if these people had installed the updates which Microsoft had created some years (yes, that is **YEARS** before) to prevent just this attack. These people then wonder why they were attacked!

Microsoft releases upgrades to many of their programs, and to many Windows components, on the second Tuesday of the month. This is now called “Patch Tuesday” for obvious reasons. All these patches are available for download at no charge and will do a lot to protect your computer from viruses. Of course, while nothing will protect you from viruses, just as nothing will completely protect you from car accidents while you are driving, being sensible in both activities will give you your best chance of survival.

You can also use a program like Secunia PSI to keep all your other programs up to date. This is another excellent free program and needs little care and attention on your part after the initial run to updated everything which should have been updated a long time ago.

**Tip:** Keep your computer system (Windows and programs) up to date at all times.

### *People Do Not Remember Error Messages*

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If you would like your computer support person to be able to give you effective help you will need to be able to provide this person with accurate error messages. An inaccurate message about an error will usually start the hunt for a solution to the problem in the wrong direction if, in fact, any solution can be found from a garbled error message.

To help your computer consultant help you fix your problem you must be able to provide an accurate description of the problem together with the correct error message. It is no good stating that there is a problem: by now I, and people like me, know that the only reason you ring is that the pain of our charges is less than the pain of a continuing problem. If you would like me to help relieve your pain then I need you to provide me with an accurate diagnosis.

At this moment I am reminded of the person who went to the doctor stating the he was sore all over. “Doc,” the patient stated, “whenever and wherever I touch myself it hurts. All over!” The doctor watched in amazement as the patient continued to touch himself anywhere all the while crying in pain. “Stop!” said the doctor. “The reason that you are in pain is because you have a broken finger!” This wrong diagnosis on the part of the patient is repeated time and time again in conversations that I have with my clients.

Once I have seen the problem with my own eyes I can often tell that my client’s diagnosis is completely wrong and that they had been looking in totally the wrong place. Often, again, the fix is quick and simple; much more simple than the poor client had expected.

**Tip:** An accurate explanation of the problem is usually enough to fix the problem quickly and cheaply.

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*People Do Not Protect Their Computers*

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Computers need to be protected from those who would take advantage of the opportunity to control as many computers as possible. Far too many people have told me that they do not have anything worth protecting on their computer so it is not worth their effort even to put a free anti-virus program on their computer.

What these people do not understand is that every unprotected computer is valuable! This is because a computer can be controlled by an outsider then used to attack other computers over the internet. Such an attack is called a DDOS: a *Distributed Denial of Service* attack. This means that any computer on the internet can be stopped at will. The way to stop a computer is simple: just bombard it with lots (and I means LOTS) of small messages which need enough attention so that the computer under attack does not have enough time to respond to genuine messages.

The nett result is that a computer which you rely on, such as your bank's online computer, is unable to answer your requests because it is being attacked. There was a extreme example of this some years ago when a whole country, Estonia, came under attack. Nobody has ever been found to have organised the attack but Russia was suspected because Estonia wanted to move a statue of a Russian soldier at the time.

**Tip:** Keep your computer up to date at all times so that it is not used to attack others.

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***Further Information***

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Secunia PSI [www.secunia.com](http://www.secunia.com)