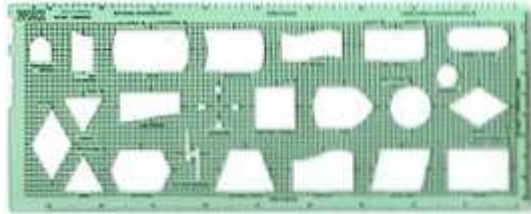


Radio Days – 2011-11-19

Tip of the Week – What is the Cloud?

During the week I had a conversation with a listener who was confused because I did not explain what the cloud is in such a way that he could understand. This put me on notice to do a better job this time round, so I start with a little history lesson.



When I started programming in 1974 I was given a small plastic flowcharting template with shapes which you could trace around on the inside. I have managed to find the image of the template which I used all those years ago on the internet, and it brings back old memories. Later versions of these templates included a cutout for a network

(because networks were just coming into fashion) and it looked like a fluffy cloud. To connect two computers using a template like this one you showed one computer linked to the cloud from the left and a second computer linked to the cloud from the right. You could add other computers if your diagram needed them.

From this humble beginning the term *cloud* became used for a network of computers. As time went on the term *cloud* transferred itself from *a* network of computers to *the* network of computers: the internet. In the context which I used it last week the *cloud* is any computer which is part of the internet and provides a service to you and your computer. Examples of these services are:

- Online backup
- Online document preparation
- Online emailing

Wireless Internet Traps

I have had a number of clients ring me over the last week or two who had problems with their wireless internet. This is a vexed problem for many people because they do not understand the technology involved.

What is Wireless Internet?

Many people are confused by the term *wireless internet*, and for good reason. This is because the term, as commonly used, has two meanings and because many people do not understand either, let alone the difference between them. The difference is simple once you start using the correct words to describe them.

Wireless internet uses a mobile telephone network to carry internet data. This is the most expensive way of accessing the internet, but the best way if you need to be able to access the internet from many locations. As a way of accessing the internet from a single location you will usually find that ADSL (if available) or satellite are better.

- **WiFi** is a technology for accessing the internet in a restricted area like your home or a coffee shop. It has a short-range (up to about 10 metres) and may be secured with a password if needed either for security or for asking users to pay.

This week I am talking about *wireless internet*, and not about *WiFi*.

How Do You Use Wireless Internet?

The answer to this is simple: you buy a device from a mobile telephone company and use it to connect your computer to the internet. The most common device is a USB stick which acts like a mobile phone, but it only transfers data. You can, of course, use it to make telephone calls using a program like Skype. This will cost you less than using a mobile phone, especially if you call overseas, but it still uses some of your data allocation.

Before you use your USB stick (or other device) for the first time you have to install the appropriate software. This is usually done from the USB stick itself so mostly there are no problems there. Then next step is to register your device: this, again, is mostly automatic. After you have done all this you are then able to access the internet from wherever you can receive the stick's network's signal. As usual, no signal means no internet.

Getting More Data

One of the problems with pre-paid wireless mobile internet is the cost. Every time you buy a recharge you get a certain number of days before your recharge expires and a certain amount of data which you can download (and usually upload as well). If you do not use all your allocated data in the allocated time you lose out. This is yet another way that the telecoms companies make money from us all. Please check just how much data in what period of time a recharge will give you as things vary immensely by amount and by supplier. If you are an infrequent internet user you may find that a small recharge amount is the best way of buying internet time.

In preparing this week's talk I went to the two largest telecoms providers and found that the information available on each website was unbelievably gobbledegooky. I could not find any indication of how long a recharge would last or how much data it would let you download and the minimum data size for each access time. No wonder the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (T I O) is having problems with companies like these!

If you are one of the lucky people who has some idea of how often you would use the internet and how much data you would upload and download in each session then you may, if you are really persistent, find a deal which will suit you.

Please do not hold your breath!

Prepaid Wireless Gotchas

I had a recent client who had a prepaid mobile internet connection. She then discovered that she had no connection so bought a recharge amount. She then found that she still could not access the internet to use her recharge voucher so she called me.

I had the same problem so rang her telecom provider. It turned out that this provider shut down a prepaid mobile internet device (in her case a USB stick) if it had not been recharged within the last six months. Her only recourse was to buy a new SIM card (fortunately only a few dollars) and insert that into her USB stick. We then had to call the telephone company (*your call is important to us, so please stay on the line*) to get this combination registered and working. After a mere hour all was well and she had her internet back.

The moral of this story is that, if you are going to use the internet very infrequently from one location, you may be better off getting a dial-up connection. The costs for this are usually much less than for prepaid wireless and you do not have to go through hoops if you only use the connection once every six months or so. There is a possible problem: dial-up modems are becoming harder to find because so few people use them.

Further Information

Skype www.skype.com

T I O www.tio.com.au