Radio Days – 2013-11-30

Tip of the Week – Help Wanted!

During the week a regular listener rang the station and left a question for me to answer on-air. So far so normal. Unfortunately there were some ambiguities which I could not resolve with the information given to me and, because the caller left a name but no call-back details, I could not ring him to clear up the problems.

Support Over the Phone

This reminded me of a call which I received when I was working at MYOB. The caller was using a phone which was some way from the computer. This meant that I was talking to one person who was then talking to another who was out of sight. The only person who could see the screen was not able to tell me directly what was on the screen because the person on the phone was not relaying messages directly but translating them on the fly.

This is the modern version of Chinese Whispers!

It rapidly became apparent that we were going nowhere and that this call would take a long time without resolving the problem. I then told the caller to move the phone or the computer so that one person could both use the phone and work the computer. This, in my experience, is the only way that computer support can be given over the phone.

Support Over the Internet

There is another way to give support, and this way is being used by more and more support organisations. As an aside, it is also being used by more and more organisations which are committed to breaking into your computer and then doing what they will with it. If an unknown person rings you then, after spending some time to gain your confidence, asks you to allow them to control your computer you should hang up immediately!

Many programs allow a person on one computer to control another computer. One reason to use this sort of program is that the owner of a computer to be accessed remotely is at another site and needs to access their own computer. Another reason, and this is the one which most concerns me, is helping somebody learn how to do a task while I am at home because it saves the time and expense of travelling to their computer.

The program which I use to do this is called CrossLoop and is free to use. It is both easy to use and safe for the person whose computer is being controlled. It is safe for these reasons:

- You need to start the program on your computer for anything to happen.
- Once the program starts you will see a 12-digit number on your screen. You need to give me that number before I can control your computer.
- You then need to click on *Connect* to allow me to connect to your computer.
- The last step is that you need to click *Yes* to allow me to access your computer.

Once all these steps have been done your screen's background will go black. This is done both to show you that your computer is being controlled by somebody else and to reduce the data needed to flow across the internet to my computer. I can both watch as you do something and show you better ways of doing what you need to do.

All this is a far cry from leaving a message with somebody who is trying to leave the office so that they can have a late lunch at 3 pm!

Updating Your Programs

During the week I had to install an updated version of a web browser on a client's computer. This was necessary because his favourite websites would not work with his old version of Internet Explorer (IE). The recommended version of Internet Explorer (the free web browser

that comes with Windows) for his websites was IE 9: he was using IE 6 which had come free with his early version of Windows XP. Because he was using Windows XP, the latest version of IE that he could use was IE 8: and being designed for Windows XP this version of IE would not work with his favourite websites.

IE 9 would not install on Windows XP because the current versions of Windows have later technologies which are needed to support later programs. This is the sort of reason for keeping your computer, and your version of Windows, up-to-date.

His favourite websites suggested that he use IE 9 (or later) or Firefox. His computer had an early version of Firefox so I updated that to the latest version: version 25. Using this latest version of Firefox my client's computer was able to access his favourite websites without the dreaded messages appearing. There are other browsers available: my favourite is Opera for daily use and Chrome for searching. Firefox is, in my view, an also-ran browser. All of these browsers are free to download and use.

8 April 2014

I warned my client that this was a foretaste of the things that would not work with Windows XP as the future rolled inexorably towards us. I asked him to check the date when Microsoft would no longer support Win XP and the answer was a real surprise to him.

Microsoft's support for Windows XP will end on 8 April 2014.

This is just over four months' time!

Microsoft's website explains that the company provides support for its products for ten years: this is five years of mainstream support and five years of extended support. Once Microsoft has ended support for a particular product then you can be sure that other companies will also be ending support for that product. Not only will support for Windows XP end on this date, Microsoft will also end support for Microsoft Office 2003 on this date.

One thing that I notice from my research for this article is that, worldwide, there are far too many people who have not updated their computer even to keep pace with the updates to Windows XP, and far too many people who are still using Windows XP. Based on browser usage, 6% of internet users are still using IE 6: the version of Internet Explorer which shipped with Windows XP. Another statistic: 30% of all people who browse the internet are using the versions of IE which only are used on Windows XP: versions 6, 7 and 8.

These statistics suggest that there will be a lot of vulnerable computers in just a few months. Users of these computers will probably not be able to download updates to their anti-virus program after April next year. To compound this problem, Microsoft stated in October this year that Windows XP users had virus infection rates of at least six times the rate of Windows 8 users. This shows the way that operating systems alone have improved in security over the last decade.

I urge all Windows XP users to update their computer as soon as possible to avoid what could be a major problem in just a few months' time.

The Opposite View

The opposite view is that Windows XP is used on so many computers that Microsoft may well be forced to continue support for Windows XP after 8 April 2014. According to Wikipedia, the market share of various versions of Windows is interesting:

Windows 7	46%
Windows XP	31%
Windows 8	9%
Windows Vista	3%

If Windows XP's market share is really higher than for all other versions of Windows except Windows 7 then Microsoft may be forced to continue support for Windows XP for longer than it had planned. This is, indeed, an interesting time to be working in computer support.

If you are committed to continue using Windows XP then you can expect that many of the programs that you rely in will not be available for updating after 8 April 2014. This means that you will be well served if you update all the programs that you use before that date. The best way, in my opinion, to find out which programs have updates available is to download and install a program which I have mentioned in the past: *Secunia PSI*.

This free program is very useful because it lets you know which programs on your computer need to be updated. The program determines this by checking to see if there is a later version of all programs on your computer, then displaying the results and allowing you to update all the programs which are out-of-date. Secunia PSI will often state that it is updating a program when, in fact, it seems unable to do so. I always use Secunia to let me know when a program has an updated so that I can then perform the update myself. It is easier and quicker than waiting for Secunia to pretend to do the update.

Further Information

CrossLoop	www.crossloop.com
Opera	www.opera.com
Firefox	www.mozilla.org
Chrome	www.google.com/chrome
Secunia PSI	www.secunia.com
Browser Market Share	www.netmarketshare.com
Wikipedia	www.wikipedia.org