Executive Stress
OFFICE SUPPORT

Newsletter — January 2002
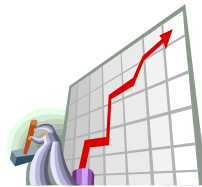
Welcome!

I hope everyone had a terrific Christmas and New Year season, and managed to take a break. Sweltering in near 40° heat kind of makes a mockery of ''Jingle Bells'' huh?!

You'll recall from the last newsletter that the first Annual VA Conference was held in Dallas in October. I was actually able to attend - virtually of course! See page 3 to find out how.

A couple of new viruses hit the Net this quarter: Badtrans and Goner - and some oldies returned. A reminder on avoiding viruses appears below.

I've introduced some technology and security tips from this newsletter which will continue to appear in the next few editions.

The results from the 2001 MBN Awards are in (p.4). A clean sweep by a young Queensland entrepreneur

Here's to a successful 2002!

who also won the Micro Business of the Year award.

A few new clients joined us this quarter - see page 4 for an idea on what type of work we can look after for you.

"...companies should focus on their core competencies and outsource everything else." Bill Gates

I hope you enjoy the newsletter! Till next quarter.

Virtually yours

Lyn P-B

January 2002

Volume 2, Issue 1

Inside this issue:

Avoiding Email Borne Viruses

As a VA I'm very conscious of the threat of computer viruses - not only because I need to protect my own systems, but I have a duty not to pass on the nasty to clients and colleagues.

However, I can't believe the number of times my antivirus software (AVS) picks up viruses coming from other VAs. And not just the new ones like Goner and Badtrans. Remember Snow White? My AVS stopped that one as recently as the first week of January!

No-one is ever going to be completely safe from computer

virus attack. It seems as fast as definitions are updated and fixes are released the hackers are writing new viruses. Avoiding viruses is a matter of procedure. Having procedures in place and then rigorously following them until they become habit.

Here are some tips to help you avoid viruses, if you are using Outlook or Outlook Express (yes, Outlook Express is just as vulnerable to virus attack - it's a Microsoft product too!)

Avoiding viruses is a matter of policy and strict procedure - make it a habit.

1. Always view your email in Preview Pane - don't double click the email to open it for reading. Some viruses doing the rounds are capable of being launched just by this simple action. If you've set up your email program to automatically open email as it comes in, turn it off.

2. Install AVS - such as Norton Anti-Virus or PCcillin. And know how to USE it. Just because it's on your system doesn't mean that it's

Technology/Security Tips

Security

More and more people use computers for everything from banking and investing to shopping and communicating with others through email or chat programs. Intruders (also called hackers, attackers or crackers), with the ability to access computers, can consequently view this information.

Whilst they don't necessarily want to read your email, they may want to use your computer to launch attacks on other computer systems (primarily high-profile computer systems such as government or financial systems), or to send spam emails, or gain access to your passwords and credit card information.

Intruders exploit "holes" in computer software. When discovered, vendors usually develop patches to address the problem. But it's up to the user to ensure they have correctly downloaded and installed the latest security patches. If you use chat programs, make sure that the program doesn't allow outsiders to execute commands on your computer.

What is ...

Broadband - is the general term used to refer to high-speed network connections. Connection via cable modem and Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) are frequently referred to as broadband internet connections.

Bandwith - is the term used to describe the relative speed of a network connection. For example most current dial-up modems can support a bandwidth of 56 kbps (thousand bits per second).

Cable Modem Access - allows a single computer (or network) to connect to the internet via the cable TV network. The cable modem usually has an Ethernet LAN (Local Area Network) connection to the computer and is capable of speeds in excess of 5Mbps. Typical speeds tend to be lower than the maximum however, since cable providers turn entire areas into LANs which share the same bandwidth. During periods of peak demand therefore, cable modem users may experience slower network access, and may be more susceptible to risks such as "packet sniffing" and "unprotected windows shares"

Avoiding Email BorneViruses contd...

protecting you. Update your definitions every day - once a week is no longer enough. If you have an Auto Update function, turn it on. If you don't, subscribe. It's your insurance!

3. Ensure email scanning is on - for incoming and outgoing email if you have the facility in your AVS.

4. NEVER EVER open an attachment to an email without first scanning it - even if it is from a trusted source - even your mother! Not even if you were expecting it to be sent. This applies to ALL attachments, not just the usual suspect .exe files. A simple procedure to follow is set up a folder on your desktop called

something like "Attachments". Drag the email message to this folder. Scan the message, open it and then drag the attachment to the folder for scanning. Sounds onerous I know, but it's imperative the procedure is followed … ALWAYS!

5. If you share disks, CDs or other removable media, always scan files before opening them.

6. Think about installing a firewall such as ZoneAlarm (www.zonelabs.com). When I installed it I was hacked four times in one hour by someone in Beijing looking for open ports (next newsletter I'll tell you how I found them!). A colleague nearly lost her cable connection because someone was using her system to send tens

of thousands of spam email messages. (A note about firewalls: more is not better. Run one. Running more than one at a time can render each useless. And they are not foolproof. They are one part of an overall security policy. See Symantec Security Response Newsletter Nov 01 for limitations - www.symantec.com.)

Hoaxes. It's a good idea not to pass on those chain letter emails - and I can assure you nothing bad will happen to you if you don't … I promise! - or virus warning emails without checking them first. All they do is clog up email systems worldwide, and lead to our letting our guards down when real threats come along! ∨
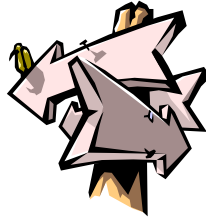
Technology/Security Tips contd...

than users with other types of connectivity (this will be described in a future newsletter).

DSL Access - provides the user with dedicated bandwidth ("dedicated" between the user's home and the DSL provider's central office) . However the maximum bandwidth available is usually lower than the maximum cable modem rate because of differences in their respective network technologies. Whilst not as susceptible to "packet sniffing" as cable modem access, DSL access is still vulnerable to other security risks.

Dial-Up Access - sometimes referred to as "dial-on-demand" services, you only connect to the internet when your computer has something to send, such as email, or you want to load a web page. The call is disconnected manually or automatically after a period of idleness. It is more difficult (not impossible) for an attacker to take advantage of vulnerable network services to take control of your computer on dial-up access, as each call made connects to a pool of modems at the ISP, each modem having a distinct IP address, and therefore your computer gets a different IP address on each call.

Protocol - is a well-defined specification that allows computers to communicate across a network. In a way, protocols define the "grammar" that computers can use to "talk" to each other.

IP - stands for "Internet Protocol" and can be thought of as the common language of computers on the internet.

IP Address - is similar to a telephone number. When a computer on the internet needs to send data to another computer it needs the IP address. IP addresses are styled: 10.27.398.4 or 345.094.58.332 for example. Static IP addresses occur when an ISP permanently assigns one or more IP addresses for each user. Dynamic IP addressing allows the ISP to efficiently utilise their address space as IP addresses of individual users may change over time.

DNS - Domain Naming Service is like a telephone directory for IP addresses. If you know the name of the server (www.execstress.com) and type this into your browser, your computer asks its DNS server what the numeric IP address is associated with that name. ∨

(More next newsletter!)

VA Conference 2001

My dilemma last issue about making it to Dallas for the "First Annual Virtual Assistance Industry Conference", was solved by the event organiser, Mr Alfred Gandee, MVA, who, after receiving a number of inquiries about "virtual attendance" opened a special session of the conference to virtual conference room technology.

A headset and mic were all that was needed to participate virtually in the Conference in Dallas.

The Strategic Goals Forum was held Sunday 21 October at 7.00am Brisbane time. Through WebTrain.com a virtual conference room was opened to the conference.

Armed with headset and microphone I was able to participate with my US counterparts (and other on-line VAs from Canada, Colorado and Florida) in a lively and informative Forum - in real time! I was even able to view the presentation slides.

This is a great way for consultants to liaise with clients without the necessity of going to the client's office. It's also a great way to hold training sessions and seminars.

If you don't have the need for regular chat room facilities (WebTrain charges a monthly fee to hold the space for the room) then the option offered by Communityzero.com may suit you better. CommunityZero Core is essentially a private interactive website, which among other collaborative tools, offers live chat and instant messaging. Best of all it's free!
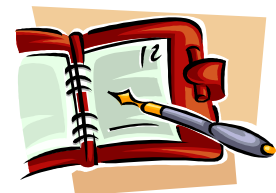
When you take into account the costs associated with on-site meetings, such as travel, travel time, your time, coffee, and any presentation materials, it makes sense to utilise this kind of technology. ∨

New Clients

The following new clients benefited from partnering with Executive Stress Office Support and we welcome them all!

If you haven't discovered the benefits of partnering with a VA yet, give us a call and we'll answer all your questions.

¶ **Lyndall De Marco** (VA Services)

¶ **Hutton's Painters** (Quote preparation)

¶ Q-COMP - Review Unit (Tape transcription)

¶ **AEC Office Services** (Proofreading/editing)

¶ **Greg Cole - University of Illinois, USA** (Digital transcription/email services)

September 11, 2001 - VAs Offer a Helping Hand

Just a note about the disastrous end to 2001.

The VA industry banded together and offered support to displaced New York City businesses in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. As a group, we wrote to the then Mayor of New York City offering support services. I am unaware whether the offer was taken up.

Pray for Peace Hope for Justice

Online fundraising went into full swing, and PayPal recorded over US$2.2 million in contributions from 60,000 generous members. The money was delivered to the American Red Cross who acknowledge the support on their website. (www.redcross.org/news/ds/0109wtc/010913thankyou.html)

(More on PayPal in later newsletters.) ∨

VA Industry Taking Shape - Survey

Two years ago there was no such thing. Today, thousands of independent contractors call themselves VAs - IT workers, paralegals, even some accountants and comptrollers. Some juggle full time jobs while trying to launch VA practices in the off-hours, others were recently laid off - all are working from home.

VAs rely heavily on VA industry organisation, web portals and clearing houses to learn the business, gain support and find clients. These organisations include the International Virtual Assistants Association, International Association of Virtual Office Assistants, Staffcentrix, and A Claytons Secretary. They offer members education, certification, peer mentoring, community features, downloadable business forms, conferences and client leads. IAVOA offers discounted web hosting and ISP services as well. Membership is cheap and many VAs belong to more than one.

Staffcentrix conducted a survey (available at www.staffcentrix.com) which sheds some light on VA demographics.

þ 97% of its members are female.
þ 36% have been in business less than 1 year.
þ 40% also work full or part time.
þ 50% are work at home parents.
þ 36% are military spouses.
þ 14% live in rural or underemployed areas.
þ 64% offer DTP.
þ 56% web research.
þ 73% word processing.

Services range from technical writing, systems management, marketing and advertising, call centre support, programming, graphic design, database management and academic writing. ∨

MBN Awards - The Winners

The 2001 Australian Micro Business Awards took place in October 2001. Winners of each category were as follows:

¶ Women in Business - Mary-Anne Ubaldino (Sheepskin Express)

¶ Emerging Business - Raeleen Gillet (Octahedron Pty Ltd)

¶ Established Business - Virginia Colbran (Your Business Solutions)

¶ Home Based Business - John Hocknull (College Prospects of America)

¶ Special Youth Award - Raeleen Gillet (Octahedron Pty Ltd)

¶ Dept of State Development National Finalist - Raeleen Gillet (Octahedron Pty Ltd)

It was a bit of a clean sweep by Octahedron, who also went on to win the National Emerging Business Category and Micro Business of the Year Award in Canberra.

Raeleen's business is an IT company specialising in the jewellery industry, providing software and technology solutions to jewellery retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers. Products include a business management system, an image dome light box, a jewellery education touch screen kiosk, a virtual display unit for videos and pictures, and a freestyle catalogue creator. All this at just 22 years of age!

Congratulations to Raeleen and the team at Octahedron Pty Ltd! ∨

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