Newsletter

Welcome!

WE'VE HAD a quiet few months with a number of clients overseas … and end of financial year seeing us all a little preoccupied! But we did manage to partner with a few new clients.

However, there are a couple of news items from this last quarter. I was made moderator of the Forum at the newly-formed Australian Small Business Network (http://australiansmallbusiness.net/), which is open to all Australian small business owners to network, share experiences and offer advice. A free listing in the directory is available.

I was also awarded another accreditation: Accredited Secretary Online, which recognised my prior learning, continued professonal development, experience and participation in the VA industry. So now clients can be even more assured that they are dealing with a professional who is dedicated to providing the support services they require!

On the home front, David's shoulder reconstruction is healing well and he has accepted that his rugby days are over - it was a very short career!

And we welcomed another member into our family when we adopted an Alaskan Malamute named Zeus, who's owner was relocating. What can I say? I'm a sucker for a cute face.☺

Till next quarter!

Lyn P-B

> **Y**ou can't have everything … where would you put it?
> - Anon

Spam Filters

SPAM … We all get it … We all hate it! Here we continue our look at spam blocking software: what it is and how it works.

(Reprinted from Woody's Email Essentials)

Pattern Matching Filters

Pattern matching filters extend the built-in rules you find in programs such as Microsoft Outlook and Outlook Express. Instead of leaving it up to you to build a set of filters which trap suspect email, pattern-matchers use their own set of pre-fab filters and automatically update those filters over time. These programs look for telltale signs of spam within email and in the subject and sender lines of the email. For example, email containing the words 'free sex' or 'Viagra' or 'business opportunity' is tagged as spam.

Drawbacks: Pattern matchers result in a lot of false positives. If someone sends you a report containing demographic data broken down by sex, there's no way for a pattern matcher to know this is 'okay sex' and not 'bad sex'. Even worse, many pattern matchers don't even consider words as a whole and instead match a series of characters no matter where they occur. So a friend's rant about the "scumbags in power in Canberra" will get tossed out together with spam about bodily emissions.

Challenge Response

Challenge/response requires each sender to get permission before their email is sent through to the recipient. The recipient sets up an initial whitelist; when email comes from a sender not on the whitelist, an automated challenge is sent to the sender who must respond by filling in a form, answering a question or in some way replying to the challenge. The response requires human interaction - it cannot be completed automatically by computer. If the required response is not forthcoming, the email is blocked.

The thinking behind challenge/response is that most spam is generated automatically and sent

out en masse by special broadcasting programs. This automation means there's no human on the other end to respond to any challenge issued. Even if the spammer circumvents this, issue enough challenges and responding to them becomes uneconomic for the spammer.

Drawbacks: Challenge/response is annoying for legitimate senders. Anyone not on your whitelist is going to get an automatic "prove yourself" notice which is a slap in the face as well as a time waster. If they fail to respond, you'll never know. Challenge/response also doesn't work well with automated mailing lists and newsgroups. If you subscribe to newsletters, a challenge/response system may block your subscriptions unless you remember to put each and every address into your whitelist. And, because the challenge is issued to the sender of an email - in this case, a newsgroup - it may end up being broadcast to the entire newsgroup list. Imagine what might happen if several users' challenge/response systems started duking it out in a newsgroup. That's a sure way to get banned from the group.

Bayesian Analysis

Bayesian analysis uses statistics to assess the probability an email either is or is not spam. Not only does it look for words which frequently occur in spam, it also assesses the entire content of the email. Unlike simpler filters which raise flags as soon as they encounter spam-like language, Bayesian analysis balances suspect word usage against the overall context of the given email. In fact, Bayesian analysis is, essentially, the mathematical equivalent of what we humans do when figuring out whether email is spam: it assesses the same types of factors we consider when we take the quick glance usually needed to determine whether an email is spam. It also learns as it works, improving its guesses and tailoring them to the individual user.

Several spam blockers fall somewhere between pattern matchers and Bayesian analysis. These 'heuristic' blockers look for telltale signs of spam - the sender's address, language used, character sets (a lot of spam uses Asian character sets) and so on - and balance these characteristics in determining whether an email is spam.

Drawbacks: Bayesian analysis is a comparatively recent entrant in the spam blocking field, and so there is not a great deal of choice in programs using this technique. Although Bayesian techniques keep false positives to a minimum, they may lead to a fairly high proportion of false negatives.

Although each spam fighting technique has its problems, you're almost always better off using a spam blocker than trying to go it alone. The key is to find a program with which you feel comfortable and which uses a combination of techniques to minimise false positives while blocking as much spam as possible.

How to Stay in Business ...

EVEN WHEN THE SKY FALLS IN!

A GARTNER RESEARCH found that 50 percent of all businesses fail after experiencing a major disruption. From an earthquake to stolen laptop every business is at risk, and the need to manage it has nothing to do with your size.

If a disaster hit your business, would you be prepared? Do you have a Business Continuity Plan?

There are numerous possible disasters that can disrupt your business, natural and man-made. Only a short while ago a major electricity failure hit businesses in Wanneroo, Western Australia. How many of them had a contingency plan to minimise loss? What do you do if you lose your access to the internet and email messages? Do you back up your computer data regularly?

Businesses that manage risk effectively stay viable and profitable in the long term. Part of business continuity planning is the assessment of the likely risks that can occur, and the measure of their impact on your business. From this risk analysis you can determine priorities and cost effectiveness. You also need to anticipate subsequent contingencies, such as securing the premises to prevent looting after damage to the building.

List the risks to which you could be exposed, their impact and the likelihood of their occurrence. Then list these risks in priority order with preventive/mitigation procedures. Flesh out this fledgling plan with responsibilities, emergency telephone numbers and contact numbers.

When you have written the first version of your plan test the plan to make sure you know what to do should the real thing happen. Revisit and test this plan at least every six months, but keep the content current. Business drivers change and technology changes.

All responsible business owners have fire insurance. Most of them never have the need to use it but they carry it anyway. The same philosophy is true with a

business continuity management plan. If you do not have one, stop and visualise how you would act and feel during the five minutes after a disaster strikes your business.

Terence Kierans
Principal, Cyberspace
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Santa Claus is coming ...

ONLY 12 WEEKS till the Big Guy makes his landing. Are you ready with your corporate gifts and Christmas cards?

If not, eSOS™ can source hampers, corporate gifts and custom printed cards for your business. But you need to be quick! Hamper orders close **5 November** and card overprinting needs to be arranged by **19 November** - still think you've got enough time?

Charities supported this year include the Australian Red Cross, Heart Foundation and Children's Cancer Institute.

If they aren't already, we can arrange for your contacts to be input into a professional database, which will facilitate mail outs for this and future marketing projects. If orders are received by the first week of November, we'll set things up for you for just **10¢ per record**.

If you'd like us to look after labelling and mailing of your cards, we can provide this service to new and existing clients for the special Christmas price of 15¢* each (up to 1000 cards).

So get moving! Have eSOS™ take care of your Christmas mailing so you and your staff can sit back and enjoy the Silly Season!

* Excludes postage

Psst ... need a flow chart?

So you need a flow chart? SmartDraw has joined the stable of latest software packages offered by eSOS™ and we can now provide clients with professional flow charts at a fraction of the time taken by some other programs.

SmartDraw.com is the leading provider of easy-to-use business graphics software. Profitable since its founding in 1994, the company attributes its success to one fundamental design principle: *Keep it simple.*

SmartDraw doesn't just look after flow charts. Organisation charts, networks, floor plans, calendars, timelines, forms and more can all be handled by this flexible program.

So next time you need a flow chart or organisation chart, don't waste valuable time fumbling over getting it right - let us use latest technology to make your life easier!

Problems mount with Windows XP SP2

So what else is new right? Since it's release earlier this year a number of glitches have arisen with the upgrade. The following article is exerpted from **Windows Secrets Newsletter**.

People are going to have some problems with SP2, one of Microsoft's most intrusive and potentially disruptive updates ever. According to asset-monitoring firm *AssetMatrix*, about 10% of the PCs upgraded from Windows XP to SP2 in their test universe experienced some problems. That figure comes from a study of over 44,000 upgrades at over 340 companies. Statistically, 10% might not sound like a particularly high number. But that will be of little comfort if you're among those who will experience these difficulties.

A study by the *SANS Institute* is a little less positive. The company's Windows XP Service Pack 2 experiences page has, at this writing, received over 1500 responses. More than 28% of the respondents have experienced "big problems" with SP2. About 1/3 of those respondents had to actually rebuild some systems. However, 8% of the "big-problems" group described the problems as "solvable." Meanwhile, 23% reported just "small problems" and 43% reported "no problems". This is, of course, an unscientific sample and reflects only those participants who chose to send in their findings.
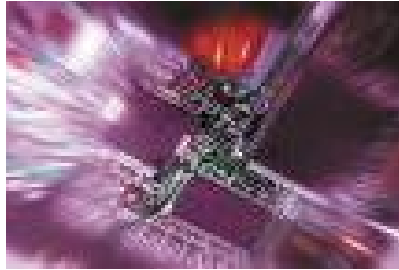
Fred Langa of *Information Week* has brought together a collection of user experiences with XP SP2 (http://www. informationweek.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID =46200911). After wading through hundreds of e-mails from pioneers who wrote to him, Langa says, "readers reported more SP2 successes than failures by about a 2:1 margin. But a number of the reports of successes with SP2 involved multiple machine installations (in some cases, hundreds of PCs), so the actual success/ failure ratio is even higher".

The SP2 update can be uninstalled, but in some cases this is difficult to do. So Langa recommends that companies not roll out SP2 until they've conducted a pilot program on the upgrade and backed up the machines that will be upgraded.

Pop-up blocker interferes with Windows Update

Microsoft acknowledged on Aug. 31 that the browser's pop-up blocker in SP2 can cause the Windows Update site to halt with "HTTP error 500." (Other pop-up blockers can cause this, as well.) The solution is to add the Windows Update site to the browser's list of sites that are allowed to use pop-up windows. This is explained in Knowledge Base article 883820.

Slow SP2 Uptake

Last week, Microsoft revealed that between 15 and 17 million people have updated to SP2. This is far short of the more than 300 million Windows XP users in the world and the 100 million people Microsoft hopes will upgrade by the end of October. At least two publications are investigating why companies are taking the slow track to SP2. *eWeek* reports that many IT managers are delaying the installation of SP2 for months because it may break too many applications. Meanwhile, a survey of 32 IT managers published in *Computerworld* on Aug. 30 reveals that none have yet installed SP2, except for two who were part of Microsoft's early-adopter program. The reason for the delay is the requirement for application-compatibility testing. This shouldn't be surprising, as application compatibility was known to be needed prior to SP2's release.

Final Thoughts

As the weeks wear on hackers will no doubt discover vulnerabilities in XP SP2 and other problems will emerge. But nothing we've seen so far changes our initial assessment of SP2. For individuals, the security improvements in SP2 outweigh the small probability of problems. That's still true now, several weeks after SP2 started shipping. Companies running proprietary code should definitely test SP2 to make sure it will work properly on your systems.

The bottom line is that we believe SP2 should be added to your systems as soon as possible, rather than waiting as long as possible.

Contact Us!

Some clients still appear to have our old contact details. Please note that our new phone and fax number is: **+61-7-3375-5613**. The old numbers will be disconnected shortly. Other contact details remain the same.

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