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News & Info from ...

eSOS
executive stress office support

Newsletter: Vol. 9, Issue 2 - June 2009

Quote: "They once said that a black man would be President when pigs flew. His first 100 days and - wham! Pig's Flu!!!"

- Anon

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WELCOME!

Dear [subscriber-firstname],

June already? My head is spinning the speed at which this year is flying! It's been nearly one year since our move to Warwick and the tree change has been just brilliant! Ceilidh is thriving in her new school and Dave is loving being semi-retired. He's making some beautiful decorative ironwork pieces - some of which can be seen at his site here so check them out! He has found a real flare for this kind of work and takes custom orders! :)

I've spent the better part of the first half of this year looking into the benefits of social media for business networking: Facebook and Twitter especially. I prefer to call it "Virtual Networking"! This newsletter includes an article from me on Twitter as well as links to some recent blog posts I've made of my experiences - and if you missed our April AVBN Webinar on **Social Media and Community Networking**, then you can pick up a copy of the recording from the site.

Unfortunately the Online International VA Convention was postponed from May this year to October 1-3, 2009. I'll be presenting my **5 Tips for Starting Your VA Practice** at some time over that three days.

I can now also finally announce that I've been working on an international board for nearly the last year on finetuning a new global VA certification program which will hopefully go some way towards raising the bar for the industry, as well as providing clients with a level of protection when looking for professional virtual support. See the short article later in the newsletter.

Other news is I've had my brilliant graphic designer - Katie Moor - redesign the eSOS logo and the site is being redesigned by Janice Kalyniuk to fit the new colours (should be ready by July 1). Let me know what you think! If you're looking for a graphic designer who knows her stuff, Katie is your girl! And you can't go past Janice for her web design prowess! Also a big thank you to Jewel West at Vieve for the design of the banner for our newsletters!

Till next quarter!

Virtually yours

Lyn PB

PS: Don't forget: click here if you want to be unsubscribed. If you have a friend/colleague who may be interested in the content of our newsletter pay it forward and forward the newsletter to them.

Gmail Offline

Reprinted from Office for Mere Mortals #10.02

Google's online email service Gmail can now be used in your web browser even if you don't have an Internet connection. This means you can work on your email whether the Wi-Fi is working or not.

Even if you have a reliable Internet connection, Offline Gmail is a useful safety feature in case your net connection dies. It can be frustrating to lose a partly written email because the connection dies ... offline Gmail can help avoid that particular annoyance.

Going offline with Gmail

Switching Gmail to offline mode is simple. Go to Settings | Labs, Enable the Offline option then click 'Save Changes' way down at the bottom of that page.

An 'Offline' option will appear on the top line of the Gmail browser window (next to Settings). Click on that to see a dialog that will install Google Gears (if necessary) and authorize Gmail to use Gears.

Then you'll see a progress bar as your email and settings are first replicated to your computer. After a short time the progress dialog will show you how far back in time the offline storage has saved messages (e.g. "If you disconnect now you will access to mail back to September 21, 2007"). Messages are downloaded first then any attachments.

Depending on your Gmail storage and connection speed, the initial sync could take a few minutes or an hour. It is best to get offline working and fully synchronized well before you need it (ie get it working before your next trip, not at the airport during the final call to board).

Offline Settings

Under Settings | Offline you can tweak some offline settings:

- Turn offline synchronization on or off.
- Date Range. By default the last five years of mail is downloaded for offline access plus all Starred messages no matter the age. Messages in the Junk E-mail, Spam and Trash folders are not available offline. There is no option to change these settings, yet.
- Make a desktop shortcut to Gmail from your desktop.
- A link to offline Gmail troubleshooting details and help (remember this is a test system).

Gmail can store up to 7GB of email. If you make heavy use of Gmail have enough disk space to handle offline storage.

On the top of the Gmail page there's an offline icon which changes according to the connection status:

- Green tick - online and fully synched
- Green spiral - online and synchronizing
- Grey icon - offline
- Blue arrow - Flaky connection mode
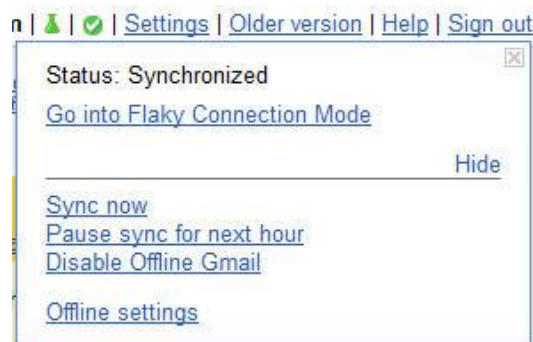
Gmail - offline icon and options.jpg

Flakey Connection Mode is good when you are on a slow, erratic or expensive link. It will force Gmail to use the offline storage copy of messages instead of looking online first. Synchronization still happens in the background.

It's nice to have options to sync immediately (useful if you're about to jump on a plane or train) and also 'snooze' the sync for an hour (if you want to save bandwidth).

Using Gmail offline

To use Gmail offline simply open up your browser and go to the Gmail page as usual. The desktop shortcut to Gmail makes this simple.

Messages you read, compose, forward etc are stored on your computer and sent off when you are next connected to the Internet with the Gmail browser window open.

Offline Gmail is stated to work with Internet Explorer 7, Firefox 2 and 3 - strangely no mention of Google's own browser Chrome (fast becoming our favorite browser). We can confirm Gmail offline works with Chrome, as you'd expect.

More than one computer

There is no reason why you can't install the Gmail offline option on more than one computer for the same account. Any and all changes on each offline instance will be copied to the central storage and then replicated to other offline instances.

This means you can access Gmail offline from a desktop and portable computer, home or work etc.

Offline alternatives

Offline Gmail is a great addition to the product but we don't feel it's a good alternative to having your own email program to store email locally.

Gmail has IMAP support so you can easily synchronize your online account with local storage via Outlook, Outlook Express or any other IMAP capable email software (most are).

Gmail also has standard POP/SMTP support which lets your email program get and send email. However POP doesn't fully synchronize your online folders with storage on a local computer.

Using your own email program with Gmail and IMAP lets you store messages in a known format that can be backed up or migrated to another program. You can continue to use familiar software instead of the web interface.

Of course, there's nothing stopping you using email software connected to Gmail at home then accessing the same email account via the web or mobile device elsewhere. That's the power of centralized storage of your email.

Do you Tweet?

If you don't understand what that means, the answer is probably no! It seems that what started out as something a CNN journalist inaccurately described as "a place where teenagers were posting what they were doing throughout the day, from the cereal they were eating to the movies they were watching", Twitter has grown into a Twitosophere of over one million users.

So what is Twitter? In a nutshell it can be described as an instant communication tool/microblog where users post a 140 character maximum answer to the question "What are you doing?"

According to Deborah Micek (author of the *Twitter Handbook* and *Secrets of Online Pursuasion*), "Twitter is a powerful tool if you only use it to stay connected with your clients. But it can be used a number of additional ways to make your business life easier, better and more connected ... from attracting new clients to making powerful, new connections".

So, I decided if I was going to give Facebook a go, I might as well try this too! Besides, loads of businesses I knew were already Tweeting! (I can hear my father from the other side saying "Yes, and if they all jumped off the harbour bridge......")

But in today's fast-paced, instant information society, the sad reality is 'you snooze, you lose'.

Dustin Wax at Stepcase Lifehack has posted *A Practical Guide to Getting Started on Twitter*, summarised as:

1. Sign up.
2. Download and install Tweetdeck.**
3. Tweet 10 times.
4. Run three searches of your keywords.
5. Respond to 10 or more Tweets.
6. Follow 100 people.
7. Follow almost everyone back.
8. Find at least one Tweet to respond to every day.
9. Post at least one 'status update' every day.
10. Respond to almost every @reply or direct message.

You can **read the expanded article here**.

**Note: I've received feedback from a client that TweetDeck is very useful but a huge resource hog. It's a dominant mode app that takes over your entire screen. It is useful for business applications of Twitter as it allows you to create groups containing the tweets of all the people you know, enabling you to separate them out into business, clients, suppliers and friends. For a comparison between TweetDeck and another third party desktop client, Twhirl, see this article from The Inquisitr.

If if you DO Tweet - you can find me @execva!

How Can a VA Help You with Twitter?

Are you wanting to get on Twitter but are not sure if you have the time, energy or ability to use it effectively?

A virtual assistant can help you get started - and keep going - on Twitter. This is a perfect 'back office' function you can outsource to your VA.

Here are some of the things a VA can do for you on Twitter:

1. Set up your profile page with a unique background (including your logo if you have one) and your picture.

2. Search for people to follow who have synergies with your business.

3. Manage your follow requests.

4. Set up search terms to make finding opportunities easier.

5. Post Tweets on your behalf (provided by you).

6. Use Twitter applications to get you noticed including TweetLater, Twellow, MrTweet, and WeFollow.

Follow Me on Twitter!

These things can be done from third party applications like Twhirl which enable you to manage multiple accounts from the one application.

So there's no excuse to wait any longer! Get a VA to help you with Twitter today. You'll find a number of highly experienced virtual assistants at the AVBN Directories.

Note:

It's important to remember that these types of emerging social networking opportunities are just that - *networking* spaces. There is no doubt that you can increase your business and your profile by becoming active in these spaces. A VA can definitely help you but you also will need to put in some effort yourself to really make it work for you. Networking is about creating connections after all and in order to be successful you need to actually do the connecting! I think some of the problem comes from the term "social media" or "social networking". I prefer to call it "virtual networking"!

I've made a couple of blog posts since starting on Twitter which may be of interest and which you can read here:

Twitter observations from a relative newbie
Virtual networking a waste of time?
VAs helping clients with social networking

Word 2007 Patch

From OfficeWatch #14.03

Microsoft has released a Word 2007 patch for a problem with .docx files being opened in Word 2003.

Confused yet? It's a problem when Word 2003 (with the Office Compatibility Pack installed) tries to open a Word 2007 with an XML node attribute that has more than 256 characters. This is possible but doesn't happen often.

The fix isn't for Word 2003 - instead the patch is for Word 2007 .

You have to apply to Microsoft for the patch - details here - but unless you have the specific problems it's probably not worth getting the hotfix. We'd expect that these fixes should be included in the upcoming Office 2007 Service Pack 2.

One curiosity about the hotfix announcement is that it only mentions Word 2003 and the Office Compatibility Pack. The OCP can be installed with Office 2000, Office XP and Office 2003 - you'd expect the same problem to appear with Word 2000 and Word 2002 as well. Has Microsoft overlooked earlier versions of Office or is the problem truly limited to Word 2003?

Virtual Assistant Certification

Those who know me well know how passionate I am about raising the bar for virtual assistants and giving clients some level of protection when they decide to partner with a virtual business. I have worked on one international board setting standards for the industry which culminated in the Core Competencies for Emerging VAs, and I also put together the first certification program that looked at everything that made a VA a professional business partner for your business including education, training, client satisfaction, years in business, prior experience, activity in the industry, and skills testing - the Certified Australian Virtual Business (CAVB) designation (currently only available to Australian businesses through AVBN).

For the last nearly one year I've been the Australian representative on an international board of highly experienced virtual businesses looking at a global certification program and it has now been launched at VAcertified.com. This program also looks at professional work experience, education, training and demonstrated contributions to the VA industry and is available to VAs all around the world.

For clients, look for this symbol to know that you are partnering with a VA who meets high standards of competency, skill and customer satisfaction.

For VAs, this symbol proves that you have what it takes to do the job, that you can be trusted, and that you are all you say you are. With countless people joining the ranks of VAs every day you need something to set yourself apart as a specialist service provider who can be counted on. Visit VAcertified.com today and let clients know you're a serious virtual business service provider.

Downgrade Vista to XP in 7 Steps!

From Windows Secrets Newsletter Issue 188 by Scott Dunn

If you long for the good old days of XP and still have your install CD, this step-by-step guide will help you revert to Vista's predecessor.

These days, you have to work to find a new computer that comes with XP installed. Many PC users who upgraded their XP systems to Vista are disappointed with the newer OS's performance and other problems. In either case, as long as you have an XP installation CD, you can kiss Vista good-bye.

"Downgrading" from Vista to XP is not as difficult as you may think, but it does entail some time-consuming operations. Many online sources claim to offer techniques for reinstalling XP without having to reformat your hard disk. Based on my research, however, deleting the Vista partition and installing XP in its place is arguably the easiest approach. Moreover, this method ensures a clean install that is uncontaminated by Vista leftovers.

(Note: In certain cases, you may be able to undo an XP-to-Vista upgrade, even without an XP installation CD, by following the instructions in Microsoft article 933168. The article takes a command-line approach to the XP restoration, and also requires that you have a **windows.old** folder on your root drive.)

Make a pot of coffee and a new, clean XP machine

With your XP installation CD and your application discs in hand (and maybe a cup o' Joe), you're ready to begin:

Step 1. Back up your data. Unfortunately, you can't restore in XP a backup that you created using Vista's Backup and Restore Center. That means you have to either back up your data files manually or use a third-party backup tool that works in both XP and Vista. One such program is 2BrightSparks' SyncBack (more info), which is available in free and paid versions.

Don't bother backing up your applications; you'll need to reinstall them from their installation CDs after XP is back in place.

Do back up the folders that your portable apps use to store their data. The portable apps themselves won't need to be reinstalled, but you'll have to restore their data files from the backup.

Step 2. If necessary, configure your BIOS to boot your computer from a CD, if one is present. Insert your XP installation disk and reboot.

Step 3. When XP setup loads, follow the on-screen prompts to accept the license agreement and continue installing XP. When you get to the screen prompting you for the partition on which to install XP, select the one containing Vista and press **D** to delete the partition. You'll need to press Enter and then **L** to confirm that you want to delete all data and software on the partition.

Step 4. Once you've returned to the partitioning screen, select the unpartitioned space that used to be Vista. You may see that this space has been selected for you automatically. Next, press **C** to create a partition. Specify the desired partition size, or press Enter to accept the default allotment, which is the maximum possible partition. (Simply pressing Enter instead of **C** also creates a new partition of the default size.)

Step 5. If you're still seeing the partition screen, make sure the desired partition is selected and press Enter. Choose the option that formats the disk as NTFS and press Enter again.

Step 6. Follow the prompts on-screen to continue the XP installation.

Step 7. Reinstall your applications and restore your data from your backup.

That's all there is to it. If you ever change your mind, you can always insert your Vista DVD and upgrade from XP to Vista all over again.

New Virus!

I'm sending this to everyone who sends me email. One of you has sent a virus. It is a **very severe** virus.

Look what it did to my mouse:

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