

Executive Stress[®]

OFFICE SUPPORT

"Professional Virtual Assistance for the 21st Century Professional!"

September 2006

Volume 6, Issue 3

Welcome!

BACK FROM MY birthday celebration in Vanuatu and it's been busy catching up and also assisting a colleague who went on leave the weekend I returned! Thank you to those clients who worked in with my leave and arranged work to fit in with my absence. We had a wonderful time and I have a picture of the resort and lagoon on my pin board to remind me to not wait another 14 years before going back - or another 4 before taking another holiday!

Spring is finally here and it's nice to feel the weather warming up and hearing the cicadas during the day. But we're still hoping for a bit more rain here in Queensland to avoid level 4 water restrictions which are looming.

It's been another sad quarter unfortunately, with the sudden loss of yet another VA industry pioneer and leader - Alfred Gandee. The industry has too few male representatives

and Fred was a trail blazer who was passionate about furthering the industry and its recognition around the globe. Owner of the International Association of Virtual Office Assistants (IAVOA), co-sponsor of the annual VA Conference in the US, and founding member of VACertification.com, I knew Fred through my IAVOA membership and work with VACertification.com. He was always ready to learn more about VAs in other parts of the world and lend support, wisdom or just a friendly ear. With limitless patience, Fred gave without asking for anything in return, and at just 56 he went too soon. We'll miss him.

Till next quarter!

Virtually yours

Lyn P.B



"Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear. The brave may not live forever, but the cautious do not live at all."

- Anon

IE7 Looms

By Woody Leonhard

BY THE END OF THIS YEAR, Internet Explorer 7 will be "pushed" onto tens of millions of desktops. You'd better be ready.

Microsoft hasn't changed Internet Explorer's internal plumbing since version 4.0, back in September 1997. That version effectively wiped out competition in the browser market, destroyed Netscape, incurred the wrath of the US Department of Justice, and led to legal battles that reverberate to this day. Microsoft exercised its desktop monopoly illegally, took over the market, then sat on its laurels for almost a decade. We get to see the effects of that complacency on the second Tuesday of almost every month. Microsoft's Patch Tuesday exercise has slapped dozens of fixes and re-fixes and post-re-pre-ex-hot-cold-fixes on the tired old IE 6 carcass.

Stick a fork in it. It's done.

Microsoft extols the new, enhanced security on offer in IE 7. Of course, the 'Softies have been doing that for years. It remains to be seen whether the cracking community will be able to break IE 7 with the dexterity and alacrity currently applied to IE 6.

Lest you think otherwise, one simple fact stands out: you will upgrade to Internet Explorer 7. It isn't a question of "if." Only of "when." Even if you use Firefox religiously, even if you have absolutely no intention of using Internet Explorer, you still need to give IE 6 the heave-ho. Why? IE is so intertwined

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with Windows that leaving the old version intact simply begs for problems.

Microsoft's caught between a rock and a hard place. The 'Softies know that IE 6 sucks. Patching and supporting IE 6 costs a fortune, even by Microsoft

standards. It's an eyesore, an embarrassment, and a constant thorn in the technological side - in other words, it's bad for business. It's bad for you, too.

That's why Microsoft announced that, sometime in the fourth quarter of this year, IE 7 will be "pushed" onto any Windows computer that has Automatic Updates enabled. Unlike most auto-updates, though, Microsoft does intend to notify its customers and request their explicit approval prior to installing IE 7.

Microsoft insists that it will only allow IE 7 to install itself on computers that pass "Windows Genuine Advantage" (WGA) certification. Given the simmering controversy that surrounds WGA - and the obvious tech-support benefits that Microsoft would gain by having the more-secure IE 7 on all PCs, "genuine" or not - I can't help but wonder if Microsoft isn't going to relax that requirement. It seems incongruous that Microsoft would require customers to install WGA,

which contacts the mother ship in Microsoft regularly, before people could receive the security benefits of IE 7.

Auto-update isn't your only possible road to IE 7 enlightenment. The new browser will also be available for download via Windows Update, Microsoft Update, and Microsoft's download center. If you turn off Automatic Updates (as editor Brian Livingston and I recommend for all but novice users), you can wait a few weeks or months until the inevitable hue and cry over IE 7 surprises dies down. Then you can unceremoniously yank IE 6 out by the roots.

One interesting note: Microsoft promises that you'll be able to uninstall IE 7 and revert to IE 6 should the need arise. A simple trip to Control Panel's Add/Remove Programs will do the trick. Supposedly.

My recommendation: Wait. Even though Microsoft has been beta testing Internet Explorer 7 since July, 2005, you can bet that some skeletons will saunter out of the closet when IE 7 goes into wide distribution.

Disable automatic updates. Take care with any updates you allow Microsoft to install on your machine. And let those tens of millions of unwitting beta testers go first. Cannon fodder.

Reprinted from Windows Secrets newsletter Issue 82

It's nearly here...

Ho ho HO... LY HANNAH! It's the end of September which means Christmas is nearly upon us.

If you send corporate gifts to clients now is the time to arrange them. Gifts Direct have a terrific range of hampers of all sizes and can include personalisation including ribbons printed in your corporate colours or with specialty wrapping.

Seasonal greeting cards are a great way to keep in touch with current, past and potential clients - and a nice way to say "Thanks for your support during the year".

We can help you get organised and offer a range of services including sourcing gifts, ordering overprinted Christmas cards and even looking after the addressing and mailing.

Please contact us - **07 3375 5613** or lyn@execstress.com and we'll take the hassle out of your gift/card giving so you can enjoy the silly season.



Audio Transcription

I'm asked more and more frequently whether I provide transcription services - digital, microtape, standard tape - and also by new VAs wanting to "get in on" what seems to be a burgeoning aspect of the Virtual Assistance industry. So, here are a few tips and facts to help clients understand the costs of providing transcription services, and "newbies" who want to add this service to their practice.

A. Not all transcriptionists are alike

There are varying typing speeds, varying levels of expertise - both with WP software and with PC-based player software - and as a result, varying charge out rates. If you are a client looking for transcription services who cares about the resulting product without having to do too much post-transcription checking, you need to find a professional service. The skills of a *transcriptionist* vary from a *typist*. According to the Industry Production Standards (IPS) Guide, "Tape transcription is a specialised service, very different from general text keyboarding (which) relies on visual processing and can be measured as words or characters per minute; then corrected for accuracy. Transcriptionists, however, must rely on aural processing, and the rhythm of the work depends on the person doing the original recording. The keyboarding portion of the tape transcription process includes a certain amount of editing "on the fly" by the transcriptionist - ie paragraphing, insertion of punctuation, capitalisation,

correction of grammar (in non-verbatim transcripts) and sometimes aural identification of speakers". So what should you look for when assessing candidates?

1. Someone with at least 2-3 years of business, office or secretarial experience.
2. Keyboard speed of around 70 words per minute.
3. Good language/grammar skills.
4. The software skills to handle the project.

PLUS:

5. Someone with a minimum of 2-3 years basic transcription experience.
6. Mastery of advanced language skills, including grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure.
7. Exceptional level of accuracy.
8. Excellent independent judgment and decision-making skills.
9. Superior on-screen proofreading and editing abilities.
10. Ability to recognise errors and inconsistencies in dictated material while transcribing.
11. Proficiency in clarification of dictation without altering meaning or style.
12. Hearing acuity and language discrimination skills, including familiarity with and understanding of accents and dialects, and recognition of voice inflections within a document.

What?! I hear you say. Indeed, these are the **identified**



requirements of a *professional transcriptionist*. If you do not partner with an operator with this skill set, then you can be assured that not only will transcription time be longer, but your post-transcription proofing and editing of the document will defeat the purpose of outsourcing the job in the first place.

B. Transcription Time Determinants

Understand that transcription time is determined by the quality of the audio - any noise, accents, multiple speakers, poor tape quality, poorly positioned recording device will increase transcription time. If you have an hour of audio it is NOT going to take an hour to transcribe - even for someone with a typing speed of 120wpm. Conversational English is in the vicinity of 200 to 250wpm - add to that relistening to identify speakers in multiple-speaker audios or any undue background noise and things start to slow down.

The IPS place transcription time for a straightforward, single person, clear audio file (Class 1) at 1:3-5 - ie for every minute of recorded audio it will take approximately 3-5 minutes to transcribe. This means an hour of audio will take approximately 3-5 hours to transcribe. The range will cover things like complexity of the recording, whether it contains jargon or technical language, if the speaker has an accent and whether there is any looking up of addresses, internet searching and so on. This range goes up to 4.8-8.0 hours for a Class 5 file. Clients can decrease the amount of the final invoice by ensuring that their audio files are recorded in the best possible circumstances: better quality = less time to transcribe.

Office 2007 - Security Problem?

Reports are coming out about a possible security problem with the beta releases of Office 2007 - which makes for a good headline but really is NOT true.

The problem concerns the VML processing system - VML stands for Vector Markup Language which is a way to describe images as XML code on a web page instead of downloading a separate image (bitmap).

VML images appear not only on web pages but also HTML formatted emails. Since Office can deal with email messages (Outlook) as well as web pages there is a chance of this exploit being accessed via Office products.

However the core code that is at fault is vgx.dll which is supplied with **Windows** - not Office. While Office is involved, that's only because it uses this Windows technology, just like many other programs.

According to Microsoft the affected software is:

- Windows 2000 Service Pack 4
- Windows XP Service Pack 1 and Service Pack 2
- Windows XP Professional x64 Edition
- Windows Server 2003 and Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Service Pack 1

- Windows Server 2003 with SP1 for Itanium-based Systems Edition
- Windows Server 2003 x64 Edition

There is no patch yet available - Microsoft is aiming to put it in the next patch release around 10 October 2006.*

There are now reports of web sites exploiting this problem to drop unwanted software onto computers so it might not take long for nasty emails to start appearing. Looks like Microsoft might have to move faster for the release of a patch.

So are email messages at risk?

It seems possible for this exploit to be used in an HTML email message that appears in the preview pane of Outlook (or any other program that uses the Windows/IE systems to display HTML).

That is a serious possibility because most people initially view messages via the preview pane - if a computer could be infected just by clicking on the message to peek at the contents then a nastie could spread very quickly.

That scenario would explain why Microsoft has a recommendation (buried deep in the web page) to view all email messages in plain text only.

Whether you wish to do that is up to you. Plain text renderings of HTML emails are often very hard to read

and you might feel that's too much trouble.

We stress that the preview pane infection possibility is not proven - but it seems likely given the nature of the security gap in Windows and the specific recommendation from Microsoft.

***Update (Office Watch #11.39):**

Microsoft have finally caught up with what most security analysts were saying and have released a security update patch before the October release date. You may already have the update courtesy of Windows Update - to check go to *Control Panel - Add Remove Software* and tick the *Show Updates* button. In the list of Windows XP updates look for "**KB925486**". You can get the patch for Windows XP and Windows 2003 including the 64bit versions, here:

<http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/bulletin/ms06-055.msp>

Microsoft says the vulnerability affects Internet Explorer. This is true but as mentioned above you are NOT safe just because you don't use IE.

Despite Microsoft's efforts to reduce the apparent level of severity of the problem - this is a serious problem that everyone should patch immediately.

Reprinted from Woody's Office Watch #11.38

The Crocodiles are Crying

By Rupert McCall

The following is a poem read at the recent memorial service for Croc Hunter, Steve Irwin. I reproduce it here because whilst I realise a number of other well known - and not so well known - people have left us this year, Steve's passion for conservation matches my own and it's my small way of showing my respect for a man who had his own way of getting the message across.



"CRIKEY, I MISS HIM!"

Endless visions fill my head - this man - as large as life
And instantly my heart mourns for his angels and his wife
Because the way I see Steve Irwin - just put everything aside
It comes back to his family - it comes back to his pride
His animals inclusive - Crikey - light the place with love!
Shine his star with everything he fought to rise above
The crazy-man of Khaki from the day he left the pouch

Living out his dream and in that classic "Stevo" crouch
Exploding forth with character and redefining cheek
It's one thing to be honoured as a champion unique
It's one thing to have microphones and spotlight cameras shoved
It's another to be taken in and genuinely loved
But that was where he had it right - I guess he always knew
From his father's modest reptile park and then Australia Zoo
We cringed at times and shook our heads - but true to nature calls
There was something very Irwin in the make up of us all
Yes the more I care to think of it - the more he had it right
If you're going to make a difference - make it big and make it bright
Yes - he was a lunatic! Yes - he went head first!
But he made the world feel happy with his energetic burst

I doubt we truly count the warmth until life meets an end
To count it now I say a prayer and with words of inspiration
May the spotlight shine forever on his dream for conservation

My daughter broke the news to me - my six year old in tears
It was like she'd just turned old enough to show her honest fears
I tried to make some sense of it but whilst her Dad was trying
His little girl explained it best ... she said "The crocodiles are crying"

Their best mate's up in heaven now - the crocs up there are smiling
And as sure as flowers, poems and cards, and memories are piling
As sure as we'll continue with the trademark of his spiel
Of all the tributes worthy - he was rough ... but he was real

As sure as 'Crikey!' fills the sky
I think we'll miss ya Steve ... Goodbye.

Famous Technology Quotes

Given our dependence on technology, here are some memorable quotes from the past:

Dave Barry, humorist and cyber surfer dude: "Technology is constantly improving our lives. Look at the cellular telephone. Just 10 years ago, virtually nobody was able to get into a car crash caused by trying to steer and dial at the same time; today, people do this all the time."

Bill Gates, while trying in 1981 to justify the limit on memory size built into the original PC operating software:

"Who in their right mind would ever need more than 640K of RAM!?"

Popular Mechanics, forecasting the digital future back in 1949:

"Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons."

Scott McNealy, chairman, CEO and co-founder of Sun Microsystems, in 1982:

"The only thing I'd rather own than Windows is English. Then I'd be able to charge you an upgrade fee every time I add new letters like N and T."

Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, making a prediction in 1943:

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

Ken Olson, president, chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corp, also prophesying the future in 1977;

"There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."



And here's Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple Computer, having the last laugh with his Mac computers:

"So we went to Atari and said, 'Hey, we've got this amazing thing, even built with some of your parts, and what do you think about funding us? Or we'll give it to you. We just want to do it. Pay our salary, we'll come work for you.' And they said, 'No.' So then we went to Hewlett-Packard, and they said, 'Hey, we don't need you. You haven't got through college yet'."

Referrals

The best compliment we can receive is your referral! If you have colleagues who you know would benefit from our services please feel free to pass our details on. Alternatively, pass them a copy of our newsletter! Back issues are available by sending us an email: lyn@execstress.com We're pleased to answer any queries obligation free.



And remember our referral policy: If you're an **existing client** and refer a new paying client you will receive 10% off your next invoice.

New clients can trial our services obligation free for one hour.

We've received a number of referrals this quarter so thank you to those existing clients who have passed on the benefits of virtual assistance!

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