

Radio Days – 2009-05-09

Tip of the Week – Make Haste Slowly

One of the insights I gain when working with people is to watch just how they react to the sort of stress that comes with using an unfamiliar tool like a computer. For many people it is such a stress-creating device that they try to get the problem to go away by going at it like a bull in a china shop. This, of course, only makes the matter worse: then you have to spend much more time cleaning up the mess which you created with your initial haste. The other main way to cope with computer stress is to sit there and hope that it goes away.

Neither is a successful solution to the problem of computer stress, so I cannot stress enough the advantages of planning your computer learning so that you have all the skills that you need when you need them. If you have any need to use a computer then, as for all skills, it is much easier if you can learn how to use it well. Increasing your skill will always reduce your stress.

Festine Lente.

Keeping Your Data Clean

There have been two instances this week when I realised, yet again, just how important it is to have clean data. I was doing some volunteer work, and part of that meant that I had to ring some people. One person had a work phone number so I rang that as it was during working hours. I was told that they had left that job some five years ago. This reminded me of the first accounting program that I wrote around 1979 (before the IBM computer arrived in August 1981). When I delivered the first section the son of one of the English directors, in Australia on a working holiday, was asked to enter the names and addresses of all the company's customers. I took a quick look at the print-out of the address list and it was obvious that the data had major flaws: the post codes did not match the telephone area codes, and the format of the phone numbers was wrong, so I sat down with the young man and talked about the difference between Australian and English post codes and telephone area codes.

I realised then just how important clean data is. It was one thing to read about clean data in the trade press and another to see for myself just how much damage can be done with invalid data. Over the next few weeks we will be talking about using your computer for keeping your books accurate, and this is just a first step in ensuring that the data which you present to your friends and clients is as accurate as possible.

The company also had a number of international clients and I shudder to think just what sort of problems they could have got themselves into with invoices going astray. This, of course, was before the internet so there was no way to check addresses from peoples' or companies' websites or from reference sites like *whitepages.com.au* or *yellowpages.com.au*. It is much easier nowadays to check some data over the internet, but not all data can be corrected this way. The only way to be absolutely accurate is to ask people, and then to check: I have met too many people who do not know their email address or phone number. Albert Einstein always looked his number up in the phone book because he said that it was stupid to waste memory power on trivial things like that, but most of us cannot afford that luxury now.

What sort of data is worth keeping clean? Just all the data that you store on your computer!

Websites

None this week