

Radio Days – 2009-08-15

Tip of the Week – Faxing from Email

I had an interesting request this week: how to fax from a computer with a wireless internet connection and no landline. My immediate thought was that it was impossible as all faxes go through the telephone system. After a bit of time I thought about using VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) to get a fax line. A few phone calls produced the information that sending a fax over VOIP was prone to error at the best of times, and that a better alternative was to send an email to a bureau which converts email attachments to faxes, and can do the reverse: convert faxes to email attachments. Some internet searching produced a whole range of these bureaux with an amazingly wide range of prices. After some investigation we came up with a bureau which would send a fax to any fax in Australia for twenty cents per page.

Of course, any fax message which can be emailed could also have been sent as an email if only the recipient had email. How long will it be before the humble fax machine dies a natural death as it is overtaken by new technologies?

I really love these off-beat problems: they keep my on my toes.

Buying a New Computer

Normally I would leave this topic until later in the year because the end of the year is a time when many people buy computers for all sorts of reasons like Christmas and the start of the new school year. A number of people have recently asked me what sort of computer they should buy and my reaction is that now is not a good time because of the new technologies which are about to arrive. When a new technology is introduced the superseded item is reduced in price quite dramatically: this makes what was a good buy even better.

If you need the latest and greatest then a wait until late October will, according to the latest news, give you a newer, faster or cheaper Intel processor. The new processor range, to be called i5, is expected in late October and will be significantly faster than the current Core 2 Duo range. The Core 2 Duo is the Intel processor for home and small business computers: there is another series of processors for servers but that is outside the scope of this article.

As usual, when a new processor range is introduced, the price of the current range (Core 2 Duo in this case) is expected to drop dramatically to make way for the new range (called i5) to be introduced at a similar price to the current Core 2 Duo price. This will make the current chip a real bargain, and the new chip will provide a speed boost for those who absolutely need the latest and greatest.

The end of October is also when Microsoft will introduce Windows 7. This is Windows Vista as it should have been in 2006, and is expected to revive Microsoft's flagging fortunes. Vista has been a real drag for Microsoft: sales were much slower than expected as many people chose to stick with Windows XP. One result is that Microsoft has been forced to create many updates for Windows XP, updates which have come out long after the official *end of life* for Windows XP.

Superficially, Windows 7 is very similar to Windows Vista. Under the skin the differences are marked. There will be none of the driver problems which plagued Vista because Windows 7 is Vista as far as drivers are concerned. Windows 7 needs much less memory (RAM) and uses fewer processor resources than Vista. It also makes much better use of multi-core processors than Vista, and this heralds a new approach to writing programs in a few years as it will take this long for programmers to learn how to write for multi-processor chips. An exciting time.

Websites

None this week