Radio Days – 2009-09-12

Tip of the Week – Cookies, Cookies Everywhere

Too many people see cookies as one of the most frightening things about the internet. They are just a small amount of information about you which allows an internet site to recognise you next time you go there. Some cookies are irritating because they allow advertising sites to target the advertisements which you see, but mostly these advertising cookies can be turned off by setting a preference in your browser. The *Options* setting may hide, but it is there and you will be able to find it if you are persistent enough.

The setting which I use is to block all *third-party cookies*. Third-party cookies are those that come from a website other than the address in the address bar. For example, many of my clients have *ninemsn.com.au* as their homepage, and this sort of site is notorious for serving advertisements till the cows come home. Because I do not want these advertisements I block them as third-party cookies.

Most of these advertisements need a scripting language to work. I use Firefox as one of my browsers and it has a add-on, *NoScript*, which blocks unwanted scripts. NoScript asks if I want to allow scripts to run for each website, and I stop scripts from advertising websites.

What is the Problem?

It seems to me that, in my daily work, I spend most of my time solving problems. The main part of solving problems is to work out what the problem actually is. I have an advantage over most of my clients in that I do not have an emotional involvement with their problem. Most of my clients have spent a long time trying to solve whatever their problem is before calling me. I, on the other hand, can come to the problem with an open mind.

As an example, a client wanted to burn songs to a CD so that she could play it while driving. She thought that she was following the correct procedure, and she was. The problem was that the CD burner said that there was no CD in the drive. There were three possible causes:

- The driver for the CD drive had become corrupted
- The burning program had become corrupted
- The CD drive was faulty

I started by re-installing the driver for the CD. A driver is the program which tells Windows how to control this piece of hardware, and every piece of hardware (like a keyboard, mouse and screen) has its own driver. whenever you insert a new USB drive into your computer you have to wait while Windows installs the driver for that device. The driver for this CD drive came on a floppy disc so this tells you just how old the drive and driver were, but re-installing the driver made no difference.

The next step was to un-install then re-install the burning program. This, too, made no difference so the only other possible problem was the ancient drive. Replacing this drive with a new one made everything work correctly, but knowing this was only possible because of the methodical steps taken to solve the problem correctly.

Please make sure that you are solving the correct problem. People, it seems to me, waste more time trying to solve a familiar problem than they do working out the correct problem to solve. My advice to you is to find the correct problem, then solve that problem. You will be more effective in the long run this way.

Websites

None this week