

Radio Days – 2011-05-28

Tip of the Week – Lost Data

Backups! These are so often the bane of peoples' lives! A recent caller told me that he was unable to open old Microsoft Publisher documents in his most recent version of the program. I asked him for the error message but he could not remember.

When he rang me back after trying to open one of these documents it was obvious that the real problem was that he had saved his work on floppy discs in 1993. This was nearly 20 years ago! In those days I expected that floppy discs would last for five years so his discs were long past their use-by date. He thought that the error message was saying that Publisher could not read his documents when the real message was that Windows could not read his diskettes. I suggested that he try recovering his data using CDCheck, but that I did not expect it to work.

The lessons to be learnt from this exercise are that nothing lasts for ever, and that computer data is more likely than many other things to suffer this problem. If you do have old backups which you really want to keep then I suggest that you do two things:

- Ensure that the storage medium is readable by actually reading it and, if necessary, copying your data to a new medium if there is even a hint that the medium is faulty.
- Ensure that your data is readable by current versions of the relevant program. If your data are not readable then it is pointless keeping it. You may have to open each data file separately and save it in the new format to ensure that you can still access it.

Clean Data

There is a need for clean data, especially in a business' accounting program. I was recently reminded of the first company for whom I wrote an accounting program. The person who entered all the names and addresses of customers made so many mistakes that the data was unusable until almost every record had been corrected.

A similar result appeared this week in a client's accounting program. His customers were complaining that their statements were almost unreadable, and very difficult to check, because of errors. Another problem was that many of his statements were returned because the address on the envelope was wrong. Perhaps the most important factor was the accounts person, who was there while the permanent employee was on maternity leave, did not appear to care about any of these problems.

Does this describe your business?

A quick look at the accounts file showed that the bank statement had not been reconciled for at least a year and that customer payments had not been allocated to the correct account. Also, the amount allocated was not the amount which had been received. All in all, this was a recipe for a major disaster.

The only solution was to correct the errors. This was slow and painfully as we had to check every transaction on the statement against the original deposit book entry or the cheque book. Then, when all this had been done, we started the bank reconciliation and correcting both the amount received and allocation to the correct customer. This took a long time, as you can imagine, and yet again showed the value of doing things correctly the first time!

When did you last check your QuickBooks or MYOB data file to see if your bookkeeper was making the correct entries? Would you know what to look for?

Further Information

CDCheck www.kvipu.com/CDCheck