

Radio Days – 2011-08-20

Tip of the Week – Correct Learning

Over the last few weeks I have exhorted you to be responsible for your learning. I missed one very important point: please make sure that you learn the correct way of doing things! One client had a problem with their computer so rang me to see what had caused the problem. In finding the solution I discovered that a number of invoices had disappeared from their MYOB data file. We could not find why these invoices and their payments had vanished.

During the investigation I discovered that both the owner of the business and his employee did not understand just how an accounting program works, so they had both developed bad habits in the day-to-day operation of MYOB. Because the audit trail had not been activated in MYOB it was not possible to discover if the invoices had been entered correctly although the bank statement showed that they had been paid.

Please check that you are learning the correct way to operate your computer: bad learning is worse than useless. In this case it may have contributed to the loss of invoices from an accounting program. If this is not picked up in time the results from your reports will become more and more meaningless as time goes on.

Compression

Many people are confused by compression. This came about because a client had managed to delete most of the detail in a JPEG photograph because he did not understand some basic details about how photos are stored in JPEG format. The JPEG format is a *lossy* compression format. This means that a JPEG photo loses some of its information to make the photo take up less space. My client was making the photo smaller so that it could be sent easily by email. His way of making the photo smaller was to use a program which I have often recommended called Irfanview. Each time he reduced the size of the photo some more detail was lost.

The lossy compression used by JPEGs reduces file sizes by removing some of the detail which our eyes ignore. Each time you do any manipulation of a JPEG file the image is checked to see if there is any information which can be removed without any noticeable loss of clarity. My client was reducing the file size by 5% each time. Each time he reduced the size of the photo it lost more clarity and the artefacts became more obvious until, after some ten size reductions, the image had become obviously degraded. The damage to the photo was made even worse because he saved the file with the same name after each size reduction.

There were several things which he could have done to ensure that his photo was usable:

- Not saved the photo with its original name. This would have allowed him to go back and start again with an intact photo.
- Made the size reduction in one go. This would have reduced the number of artefacts and resulted in a final photo which he would have enjoyed looking at.
- Used Irfanview to convert the file to TIFF (this is a lossless format) so there would be no reduction of quality as the file size was reduced. He could then have converted the file back to JPEG format as the final step once the size reduction had been completed.

A backup before starting would have allowed him to recover from all this ignorance.

Further Information

Irfanview www.irfanview.com