

Radio Days – 2012-05-05

Discussion – Festina Lente I

As a schoolboy I studied Latin. One of the terms which we were expected to know was *festina lente*. It means *hasten slowly* or, perhaps more colloquially, *more haste, less speed*. In this case it is meant to suggest that you should think before acting too quickly.

The reason for this particular ramble is a conversation that I had with a client. He told me about a recent experience of his which led to a major catastrophe. He had heard me tell you that Internet Explorer, Microsoft's web browser, was one to be avoided as far as possible. He took this to mean that a Windows computer was better off without Internet Explorer, so he had uninstalled it from his home computer.

That was when the trouble started!

The next thing that he knew was that his wife was complaining that she could not get her emails. He tried all the well-known ways of getting a computer to work:

- Swearing at it
- Switching it off then waiting for the computer to come to its senses
- Switching it off then disconnecting the power so as to force the computer to come to its senses
- Praying to the great god Araldite, the goddess of sticky situations
- Repeating all the above to see if they worked on the second go

Unfortunately, none of the above worked: his wife's emails had gone to that great computer hole in the sky. So, it turned out, had much of the rest of the computer. This included all the data which they had been meaning to backup to their new external hard disc.

The only solution appeared to be to re-install Windows and all their programs.

There are several lessons to be learned from this episode.

Never Delete Microsoft's Internet Explorer

Many people do not know what Internet Explorer (IE) is: it is the program which they use every time they connect to the internet. The symbol in the link that they click on is a blue "e" with a golden stripe around it. It is Microsoft's web browser and the easiest way for criminals to get into your computer and infect it with a virus or other malware.

Microsoft, in many court hearings in the United States and in other countries, has defended the way that IE is linked so closely with the rest of Windows. They have stated that many of the components of IE are used in all sorts of places within Windows and other Microsoft programs. The company also asserts that, should you try to remove Internet Explorer, you will make your computer stop working.

My client had heard that Internet Explorer was a dangerous program as it allowed criminals to get into your computer for nefarious purposes. This is true, but that does not mean that you should delete the program. It just means that you should install another web browser and use it for all your web work instead of IE.

He was using Windows XP and saw an item in *Control Panel » Add / Remove Programs* which allowed him to remove Internet Explorer so he went ahead and removed the program.

That was when the fun started!

The next thing he knew was that his wife could not get her emails. This was, at least in her eyes, a *Bad Thing!* My client was *In Trouble!* Things then rapidly became worse with every passing moment. At last it became clear that there was nothing that he could do to get their emails back.

Apparently they did not have a backup system in place so they could not even take a backup. And, because their internet browser had been removed, they could not download anything to

get a backup in place. They also had no way of downloading another browser. To use an old-fashioned term, they had snookered themselves. Another old-fashioned term: they had painted themselves into a corner.

In short, they and their computer were stuffed. At this stage they did the only thing that they could think of: reinstall Windows. This meant that they lost every piece of data on their computer: every email, every document and every photo.

Other Options

There were, of course, other options. There are always other options, although you may not like them. A good computer repair shop could have removed the hard disc from the computer then, installing it in another computer, saved all the data from their hard disc onto a DVD or, better, an external hard disc which they could have used as their backup disc.

The cost of a service like this is usually around \$100, so it is not nearly as expensive as losing all your data.

Another option would be to see if this good computer repair shop could have repaired their copy of Windows without losing any data. There are a number of ways of repairing Windows: and the first one to try, if you know what you are doing, is a repair install. This type of re-installation of Windows will just replace the missing or broken parts of Windows and return a computer to its original state. You will, of course, need to download and install all the Windows updates which have occurred since your copy of Windows was created.

Again, the cost of this service is usually around \$100: another good investment!

Some Websites Need Internet Explorer

If you remember what I wrote in previous articles you will know that there are some websites which will only work with Internet Explorer. I recently looked at purchasing some tickets for a show only to find that the seating plan did not work in Firefox. Out of curiosity I tried to see if this site would work in any browser other than Internet Explorer. I tried all my favourite browsers only to find that the result was the same as in Firefox: nothing to see.

Then, opening Internet Explorer, I found that the seating plan for the theatre was exactly as I had expected. The people who developed the website had assumed that everybody would be using Internet Explorer. As an aside, I wonder how people who use Apple computers manage: they do not, and cannot, have Internet Explorer.

It is for this reason that I recommend that you do not remove Internet Explorer: just keep it in reserve for those websites which refuse to work in any other browser.

Install Another Browser

I have, for many years now, advocated that people use a web browser other than Internet Explorer. There are four main other browsers, not counting the screen reader browsers and text-only browsers. The two which I like, and use most of the time, are Firefox and Opera. Firefox is excellent for almost everything but I prefer Opera for when I have to download and install a program from the internet. Opera, unfortunately, does have a major quirk when it tries to display a number of websites. If you would like to see just what I am talking about please point your favourite browser at www.brainrules.net then start Opera and load that page into Opera.

You will see that the layout in Opera is missing some vital pieces. This is what I mean when I state Opera has some quirks. These quirks, of course, do not mean that Opera is not a good web browser: it is but, like all people, it also has its quirks. For most websites these quirks do not appear so it is an excellent web browser most of the time. However, for my use, the way that Firefox handles most tasks, including moving a tab from one browser session to another, makes it a better browser.

Always Have a Backup

I have spoken about backups before. If you need to ensure that your data can be available whenever you need it you need to have at least two copies on at least two media. For most people I suggest that all data is stored on their computer as the primary medium and on an external hard disc or an external USB drive as the secondary medium.

I have met many people who store important information on an external medium because they feel that there is not enough storage space on their computer to hold their data. This is, in most cases, due to a lack of knowledge. The vast majority of modern computers have most of their hard disc space begging to be used but too many people are frightened that there is not enough room for all their data.

If only they knew!

The best place to store data is on the hard disc of your computer. If you have a very small hard disc (and this is usually true only if you have a very old computer: say more than six years) then you may not have enough room for your data. In most cases any fears that you will run out of room are, in my experience, completely unfounded.

If you are taking my advice you will store all your data on your computer's hard disc then make backup copies on external media: either USB memory sticks (up to 8 GB) or external hard discs (for more than 8 GB of data). Most people have less than 8 GB of data so one or more USB sticks is more than enough.

You will then use a backup program like SyncBack as often as needed to ensure that you have a complete copy of all your data on at least two separate devices. This is because I am still feeling the effects of the dreaded Monday morning call when I worked in telephone tech support for MYOB last century. Each caller stated that their computer had been taken over the weekend and that their backup floppy discs had been taken as well. It is for this reason that I recommend to all my clients that they remove their backup medium from their home or office when they leave.

Just in case!

Prepare For The Worst

In nearly four decades of computing I have seen Murphy's Law bite too many people. As I am sure you know, Murphy's Law states that if something can go wrong it will, and that it almost always go wrong in the worst possible way.

To prevent Murphy's Law from doing permanent damage to your computer and your mental health I recommend that you act *as though* Murphy's Law will bite you very soon. This means that you will make regular backups and keep them off-site. This means that you do not put off your backup until Monday because nothing will go wrong over the weekend. This means that you always take your backup with you so that it is at least one kilometre from your computer.

Just in case!

Further Information

Chrome	www.google.com/chrome
Firefox	www.mozilla.org
Opera	www.opera.com
Safari	www.apple.com/safari
SyncBack	www.2brightsparks.com