

Radio Days – 2012-07-28

Tip of the Week – Backup (Again!)

I have just left a client whose computer suddenly lost all its data and programs. The computer was sent to a repair shop for data recovery, but to no avail. This meant that all data and all programs had been lost! As this computer was used for a small business this meant that their MYOB data file and all the invoice and other layouts had been lost.

Nobody knows what caused this problem but neither the owners nor the repair shop could find any data files, and the MYOB data files later than February had also gone to heaven. I was shown a USB stick and an external hard disc and asked if there was anything there: fortunately there were enough files there. I managed to find a MYOB data file much later than February and they were delighted.

I then downloaded and installed all my standard list of programs, including SyncBack as their backup program. I then created the backups needed to ensure that they did not lose any more data next time the unexpected happened.

After I had done a backup I watched my client just pull the USB stick out of the computer with no thought about the damage that this action can do. It does not happen very often, but if you do pull a USB stick out of the computer at just the wrong moment you will lose all the data on that USB stick.

I then showed them how to remove a backup USB medium out of the computer's USB port. Too many people just yank a USB drive out of the computer when it is no longer needed without realising that this can delete all the data on the drive. I showed them how to *Safely Remove Hardware and Eject Media* so that the chance of this happening was removed.

Do you just yank your USB drives out without going through the proper procedure?

Take The Easier Path

For some people, learning a new skill is more than they can bear to contemplate. If you are one of these people please turn off now because I am talking about the benefits of doing just that! I have found, over the years that I have been teaching people how to use computers more effectively, that the best way to get more done in the same length of time is to learn new skills. This whole section is about the things that you can achieve.

Saving Time

My first example is of a friend who was up against a deadline late on a Friday night. She had to send out a number of letters to all the members of each of four groups, inviting them to a meeting in two weeks' time. For each of these groups there was a separate letter, and all the members of each group were invited to meetings at regular intervals. For example, members of the Board were invited to many meetings: there were Board meetings each month as well as social meetings each quarter.

This was in olden days (in the mid 1980s) when DOS was king and MultiMate was the preferred word processor. Microsoft was only making DOS, Windows may have been in somebody's dream world and Word had not even been thought of. This, of course, makes it long before many people were even born!

Even in those long-ago days MultiMate could do mail merges. This was an obvious time to use mail merge: there were four letters to be sent, and each letter had a number of people who had to receive that letter. I could have done the job in just a few minutes, and my friend, who was by now just about at the edge of going insane, could have used the break.

Perhaps this sort of time is not the best time to try to teach somebody but I could see that she was making lots of mistakes. As she was not receptive to the idea of a new skill at that time I left her to her own devices and waited until we could go to dinner and unwind.

Some days later, when her stress levels were lower, I again suggested that I show her how to do mail merge so that next time she had to write all these letters she could let the computer do the typing. Unfortunately she decided that it was better to be stressed out of her mind every time that she had to write these letters.

Keep In Style

A recent client was writing the Great Australian Novel. Like most writers she was using Word as her word processor. She had discovered the websites which will print a short run of her book and she had had five copies printed this way. While she liked seeing her work in print she was in despair because her pages did not have to required neat look that a professionally-produced book had.

However, her pages left much to be desired because the layout was not consistent across pages. I asked her if she was using styles, and she asked me what I meant. I explained that Word had a feature called *Styles* which made keeping a consistent look throughout the whole document very easy. She asked me to show her how this worked.

We went to her original document and I showed her that she had pressed *Enter* twice between paragraphs then made the second, invisible, paragraph smaller to give a neat touch to the page. Sometimes resizing this second paragraph had been done differently or not at all, and the look was not consistent across her pages. I showed her how to add some spacing at the end of her paragraphs automatically. I was then able to show her how to change all double paragraphs to a single paragraph.

She was delighted with the result.

I was also able to show her how to use styles to make her chapter headings all the same. Her book had differences in the way each chapter's heading looked: the space down the page was different, the font was slightly different and some were aligned to the right and some aligned to the left. Using styles I was able to show her how to get them all the same.

Then, as the finishing touch, I was able to show her how her table of contents was able to be created from the styles without any errors, and that all she had to do was press one function key for the table of contents to be recreated after she had made a change. I left behind a happy client who still had some work to do getting her styles correct.

When I saw her next printing she had a massive smile on her face as the book appeared to be up to professional standards. Are you using styles to their fullest extent possible?

Learn The Concepts Behind The Skill

I have spent time over the last few months helping a client use QuickBooks more effectively. Because the skills needed for QuickBooks are so different from his earlier skills he is having great difficulty in coming to grips with the concepts needed to be a good bookkeeper. For this reason I have suggested that he go to TAFE to learn the basics of bookkeeping to form a solid foundation for learning how to use QuickBooks rather than attempting to learn from a base built on sand. The old proverb states that you need a solid foundation if your work is to be lasting.

There are many good courses on bookkeeping, and I suggested to him that he do one of them so that he understands what is behind why I ask him to do each of them.

There were a number of problems which I had to fix. One was that he entered a transaction again if it appeared on the bank reconciliation but he could not see it on the screen. This meant that, according to QuickBooks, many customers had paid their invoices twice. Another problem was that he checked off a transaction with the amount shown on the bank statement even if it was the wrong transaction. Also, sometimes the bank account was in credit and sometimes it was overdrawn: because he did not put a minus sign in the closing balance the reconciliation did not balance so he used QuickBooks' ability to enter a balancing transaction to make the reconciliation balance.

Any one of these errors would have meant that the reconciliations had to be reversed and re-done to get correct results. This was not helped by a missing bank statement. All in all, this was a recipe for disaster.

Please ensure that you know what to do if you are a bookkeeper, or that your bookkeeper knows what to do if you are a business owner.

Further Information

SyncBack Backup www.2brightsparks.com