

Radio Days – 2012-09-15

Tip of the Week – RTFM!

RTFM: *Read The Flaming Manual!*

This is something that I have preached for almost as long as I have done this type of work. I came badly unstuck during the week when a client rang and stated that they had received an email from their ISP and it asked them to change some settings in their email setup.

The instructions might as well have been written in Swahili!

They asked him to do things like:

- Change the port for his POP server to 995
- Ensure that his email was setup to use SSL security

He had no way of making sense of these instructions, so they were absolutely meaningless. After he called me I managed to change the settings in his email program in about two minutes, purely because I have some knowledge of what the instructions were talking about. A normal person would have been utterly unable to read these instructions, let alone been able to understand them.

There are, of course, two messages to take from this lovely episode:

- Take everything that your computer consultant tells you with a large grain of salt!
- If you have read, but not understood, the instructions then you should get some help. The instructions could have been badly written or they could be about a subject that you cannot really expect to understand.

The worst thing that you can do is to sit there in bewilderment, wondering if you are insane.

Removing Personal Details From Your Old Computer

It's that time again: you have bought yourself a new computer and want to remove all the old data from it so that it is safe to be allowed out of your sight. There is an old story which I would hate to have happen to you. It starts with an advertisement on eBay which offers an old laptop computer for sale. The computer is bought, then dies just after delivery. The new owner wants a refund but the seller refuses. The hard drive is dead, but a computer tech is able to get a lot of the old data off the hard drive.

There is enough information there to locate the old owner. The two owners live in the same city so the new owner knows that the old owner belongs to a community which does not allow pornography. He again asks for a refund; again the old owner refuses. The new owner creates a website containing the pornography from the now-dead computer then marches up and down outside the old owner's home with a sandwich board asking people to go to his website.

The old owner becomes upset because he is thrown out of his home and community, so he sues the new owner for the removal of the website. The judge allows the website to continue because, as he states in his verdict, the old owner relinquished all title to the data on the computer when he transferred ownership of the computer.

Please do not let this happen to you.

Cleaning Old Data – I

If you are now ready to sell or give away your old computer you could just do nothing about clearing away your old data. If you leave all your old data on your old computer you run the risk of bringing all sorts of unwanted behaviour down on your head.

The risks that you run are quite considerable in this time:

- If there is enough information about you on your old computer then one risk that you run is the risk of having your identity stolen. This means that you could find that you

are liable to repay large debts taken out in your name. For example, with your driver's licence number and tax file number, together with your name, address and date of birth, a criminal could easily build a duplicate of you then take out a loan to buy an expensive item which would then be sold for cash. You would be expected to repay the loan while the criminal would have money which you have to repay.

- Another possibility is that, if you have used your computer for internet banking, then your login details may be readily available and a criminal could then transfer all your money into another account then abscond with your money, leaving you with nothing. I do not expect that your bank would refund this money: they would most likely say that you had contributed to the crime so were not liable for a refund.

For these and similar reasons I recommend that you remove all data from your old computer before you sell it or give it away.

Cleaning Old Data – II

A way to clear your hard disc of your old data which leaves Windows and all your programs intact is to just delete all your old data from your computer. Much of this data will be in folders like *My Documents*, *My Music*, *My Pictures* and *My Videos* but you cannot guarantee this.

If you remove all the data from these folders you will have removed most of your data. You will usually have your emails still on your old hard disc, and this is the reason why I cannot recommend this procedure. There may well be other data floating around that we have both forgotten about which might well come back to haunt you.

The next step is to install CCleaner on the new computer because it has an invaluable option: removing all old data securely from your old hard disc. Once you have installed CCleaner just go to the *Tools* section and click on *Drive Wiper*. This presents an option screen so select the discs that you want to have cleaned, ensure that you have selected *Free Space Only* then select the degree of wiping that you desire. I always select at least 3 passes then start the process.

It helps if you are not wanting to use this computer for a while because, on a computer with a large hard disc, this process will take at least 24 hours. If you stop to think for a moment you will realise that this program has to write over every free part of your hard disc, and this could easily be more than 500 gigabytes of space. And do that at least three times!

The reasons that I do not recommend this procedure include:

- There may well be a virus on your computer which you cannot remove if you do not re-install Windows
- There is sure to be forgotten data somewhere on your hard disc
- The problems which slow Windows are still on your hard disc

Cleaning Old Data – III

When I want to swap to a new computer I first ensure that I have removed all the data which I want from the old computer and copied it to my new computer. After some time, when I am sure that all my data has been transferred to my new computer and that all programs are working as they should, I then do a full installation of Windows on my old computer.

This means that the hard disc is formatted before Windows is re-installed. This, in theory, is enough to ensure that all my data has been removed from my old computer. The next step is to install CCleaner on the new computer because it has an invaluable option: removing all old data securely from your old hard disc.

Once you have installed CCleaner just go to the *Tools* section and click on *Drive Wiper*. This presents an option screen so select the discs that you want to have cleaned, ensure that you have selected *Free Space Only* then select the degree of wiping that you desire. I always select at least 3 passes then start the process.

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Cleaning Old Data – IV

The only really secure way to clean all your old data from a computer's hard disc is to destroy the hard disc. This is the method used by really paranoid American agencies like the CIA and the NSA. These agencies dare not let any of the really precious data out of their sight.

Even our police forces are becoming almost as paranoid as this!

The method used by these paranoid agencies has these steps:

- **Remove** the old hard disc from the system unit or laptop
- **Burn** the old hard disc to destroy all the magnetic information on the disc
- **Bash** the old hard disc with a sledge hammer to destroy the platters
- **Bury** the remains in a secure area so that the evil ones cannot dig them up

To use a modern idiom: this means that your data is dead, buried and cremated!

Doing this, of course, means that your computer will need a new hard disc before you sell it, but new hard discs are really cheap now that the dollar is high and the effects of last year's floods in Thailand has disappeared.

Further Information

CCleaner www.piriform.com