

Radio Days – 2012-10-13

Tip of the Week – Beware of Hitchhikers

During the week I had to setup a number of new computers. Part of this involved making sure that the standard free programs from the internet were installed. Unfortunately I was again reminded that far too many programs bring with them a variety of other programs and services. These programs and services are what, in my frustration, I call *hitchhikers*.

These hitchhikers vary. One program, CCleaner, wants to add Google Chrome and make this your default internet browser. I have seen many people who have installed CCleaner and found that “*my internet does not work!*”. It is not that their internet does not work but that, because they are so used to seeing Internet Explorer start when they click on a link in an email, they are surprised when another program starts in its stead.

Another problem for the unwary is when your web browser, Internet Explorer, breeds so many toolbars that you cannot see the content from the websites which you want to see. This happens because you did not check to see if a program was about to install yet another toolbar to obscure your view of the internet.

Of course, CCleaner is not the only program which does this. There are too many programs which include hitchhikers to be able to name them all so you have to check each program that you install so see if there are any hitchhikers hoping for a free ride.

One of the main tenets in program design is that there should not be unwanted surprises. If you click on a link in an email and expect to see Internet Explorer start then you should see Internet Explorer start *every* time that you click on a link in an email. For the vast majority of people there can be no possible connection between installing CCleaner and seeing a different browser after clicking on a link in an email.

If you are installing a program on your computer, or on a computer belonging to a friend or relative, please check every screen which you see as you are installing that program. The cost may be more than you expect if you don't watch what you are doing as you do the installation.

Saving Money Buying a Mobile Phone

Many people buy a new mobile phone every two years or so. My time to buy a new phone has come and, this time, I did some checking before signing on the dotted line. For the mobile phone which I want on the mobile network which I want the monthly charge on a plan is \$67: this comes to a grand total of \$1,608 for the duration of the two-year plan.

If I keep my phone after the end of the plan's contract the payments will continue at \$67 per month until I make the effort to change them.

The time has come to break free from this state of dependence on the whims of my telco. For this reason I have decided to take control of my mobile phone purchases. This resolve was prompted by two articles in which I was asked which was the best mobile phone network (on 11 August) and which was the best mobile phone (on 18 August). You can read my responses to these questions by going to my website and reading the articles for those two dates.

My answers to these questions are:

- **Best Mobile Phone Network:** Telstra. This is not because Telstra is good, or that its mobile network is good, merely that it appears to me to be less bad than all the others for the sorts or areas to which I travel for work. It is also the one which has been ripping me off for years so it is time that I started to return the favour.
- **Best Mobile Phone:** Samsung Galaxy S III 3G. This phone has the best mix of features for my needs of all the phones which suit my needs currently on the market. It has the latest version of Android so has all the ability to be modified to my usage. There are other Android phones, and indeed other non-Android phones, but this Samsung is my favourite.

Please remember both that your needs will probably vary from mine and that your patterns and style of usage will also probably vary from mine. For this reason please do not rely on this article for more than general advice. Please also check my previous articles to see what is important for you in your search for a new mobile phone.

Other Phones

There were two other contenders for this title of *Best Mobile Phone*. The Samsung Galaxy S III 4G is an excellent phone but the \$250 price increase was not worth it because there is so little 4G service outside the capital cities. In a few years, when the 4G network (LTE, *Long Term Evolution*, in Telstra parlance) covers a much wider area and data speeds are more important for me than they are now, I may buy a phone with 4G coverage.

The other contender was the HTC One XL but this dropped out of the running when I discovered that it could not accept an SD card. Because I have over 500 names in my phone book I do not want to type each one in again so I expect to be able to export my contact list from my current Android phone then import it into my next Android phone. It is easy to export my phone book from my current HTC Desire so I expected that a new HTC Android phone would be able import from my SD card. Not so, so the HTC One XL is out of the running despite its excellent reception in marginal areas. The Samsung phone does accept SD cards so it will be easy to import my phone book to the new phone.

Having decided on which phone I was going to buy and which network I was going to use there was one more decision to make: how to buy. The cheapest phones, like so many other things, are bought online so, after some research, I decided to buy from Kogan.

Kogan offers a good range of phones and its website is a lot less confusing than many other phone companies. The phones are arranged in a logical order, the details are clear and the price is comparable to the best of those that I could find online. So, Kogan it was for the phone.

Which Plan?

The next step was to find a Telstra pre-paid plan which offered what I wanted. The costs given below are all for the lowest cost on a plan and assume that you do not use more than your plan allows in the time allowed.

There are four ranges of pre-paid plans:

- **Cap Encore:** recharges last only 30 days. The minimum recharge amount is \$30. Calls charged at 89 cents per minute with a connection fee of 39 cents. The minimum total cost for 360 days (nearly a year) is thus \$360. An interesting inclusion is that all talk and text is free between 6 pm and 6 am **BUT** only until 29 October 2012. After that date you will, presumably, have to pay through the nose, especially if you were expecting that your free text and talk would continue.
- **Beyond Talk:** recharges last only 30 days. The minimum recharge amount is \$20. Calls charged at 78 cents per minute with a connection fee of 39 cents. The minimum total cost for 360 days (nearly a year) is thus \$240.
- **Long Life:** recharges last between 60 days and 12 months depending on the amount. The recharge amount varies from \$20 / 60 days to \$100 / 12 months. Calls charged at 78 cents per minute with a connection fee of 39 cents. The total cost per year or 360 days for this plan ranges between \$100 and \$120.
- **Simplicity:** recharges last between 30 days and 180 days. The recharge amount varies from \$20 / 30 days to \$100 / 180 days. This plan has the cheapest calls: 15 cents per minute with no connection charge.

As you can see, there is a tremendous range in the cost of plans and many factors to consider when you are planning to have a pre-paid phone. If you have a good idea of how many calls and texts you make each day, each week or each month you will be in a better position to

decide on the best plan for your needs. Otherwise you are in the enviable position of flying blind when searching for the best plan for your needs.

Fortunately, you can change your plan easily. There is a limit, however, of 10 changes of plan per year so it will pay you to do at least some basic research as to your likely needs.

What is Android?

Many people are confused when I mention *Android*. *Android* is the operating system for a range of mobile devices from phones to tablets. The company which created the Android system was called Android then, because Google liked the product so much, it bought the Android company and product.

All computers, and smartphones are just computers in disguise, need an operating system so that they can display information on the screen and accept your commands. If you compare an Android phone with an iPhone and a Windows phone you will notice that there are many differences. I prefer the ability to change the way my phone looks and works so, for me, an Android phone is best. If you prefer the simplicity of an iPhone and are prepared to accept that your iPhone can look any way you want it to look (as long as it is the Apple way) then an iPhone is a good product. For me the iPhone's interface is too restrictive because it only works in the iPhone way.

The other main contender is the Windows phone. The new version of Windows phone is just now coming out with the release of Windows 8 so it is still too early for me to comment but it seems to be as restrictive as the iPhone. There are many people who think that I am wrong in my comments but they work for me.

My Final Choice

After all this deliberation I have decided on the Samsung Galaxy S III 3G phone on a Telstra Simplicity plan. Using a spreadsheet I worked out that, over the life of the phone (up to four years) I would save \$1,888! This made me realise that choosing my phone, rather than letting Telstra or some other company telling me which phone to buy, can result in some massive savings.

I bought my phone from Kogan for \$528 including freight and I bought a \$100 recharge for the Simplicity plan. If I compare this with the cheapest post-paid plan from Telstra for my chosen phone I would pay \$67 per month. The basic results for this decision are as follows:

| Year | Cost | Plan | Savings |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1 | \$728 | \$804 | \$76 |
| 2 | \$928 | \$1,608 | \$680 |
| 3 | \$1,128 | \$2,412 | \$1,284 |
| 4 | \$1,328 | \$3,216 | \$1,888 |

From this you can see that the major cost is the phone in the first year. After buying my new phone I expect to pay \$100 every six months for calls. This means that I expect to save only \$76 in the first year but a further \$600 in every subsequent year. These saving will mount up each year and I can easily buy a new phone when an acceptable model comes out in the future. I am not stuck with Telstra's assumption that I should buy a new phone and new plan every two years: I can make up my own mind when I want to get a new phone or change to a new plan.

The joy of freedom!