

Radio Days – 2013-01-19

Tip of the Week – MYOB Woes

During the week I got a call from a client who has been using MYOB for six months now. He wanted to do some more learning and we made a time to do this. The first step, as you can imagine, was to start MYOB and open his data file. This was easier said than done because a message stating that his file needed to be confirmed appeared before it would open. I tried to confirm the file online as this is the easiest and quickest option. This was not successful because there was an unstated error and no option to correct the error. Another attempt was equally unsuccessful!

After waiting on the phone to MYOB tech support (*Your call is important to us!*) for thirty minutes a very helpful tech asked me to open the file in read-only mode. This immediately rang alarm bells because I did not expect to be able to recover and reset the file to normal access mode. So, having been bitten by this sort of thing before, I made a backup of the data file just in case. After opening the file in read-only mode it appeared that both his MYOB program and his data file had been updated to a later version than that recorded by the MYOB computers. This was the reason why confirming the data file was not allowed.

The tech updated the version recorded by the MYOB computers then stated that my client's version of MYOB should be updated to the latest version. This was easy: he emailed a link so that we could download the update, then ran the update program to get the latest version of the program. Next step: recover the data file from backup so that we could get back to work.

Now the critical moment: could we confirm my client's MYOB data file? Yes we could! Time taken for a ten-second job: three quarters of an hour! The only possible reason for the update to my client's MYOB appeared to be that, some months before, his accountant had had my client's computer for a few days. We suspect that this was when the update happened.

The moral of this story: if you have a choice, use QuickBooks rather than MYOB because this sort of problem has never happened with QuickBooks.

Your Computer's Data Held to Ransom!

There was a small item on the news before Christmas which stated that a Queensland medical practice had been held to ransom because its data files had been encrypted. They could not access their data file because they did not know the encryption key needed to decrypt their data files. They did not know this key because they had not encrypted their data files so they now had two options:

- Pay the ransom demand
- Reinstall Windows

This is what is meant by being caught on the horns of a dilemma: two unpleasant options and you have to take one of them.

The Problem

The problem with the loss of your data (especially if you are running a medical practice) is that you do not have the luxury of time to make a decision. The problem will have presented itself at the start of the working day when you are expecting patients to start arriving at any moment for their appointment. Other patients will arrive expecting to make an appointment to see their doctor, and you will be expected to be able to do all this within a few minutes before waiting room erupts into noisy chaos.

You still have two options, and both are unpleasant.

Paying the Ransom Demand

If you take this option you hope that you will get your data back. There are no guarantees and the chances of the criminals actually being caught are remote. This is basically blackmail, and the history of blackmail is littered with blackmailers who keep on demanding money for their silence. I see no reason why this sort of blackmail would be any different.

Reinstalling Windows

This option will only be successful if you have a good, complete and recent backup of all your data. You will also need to have the media which contains each of your programs and be able to put your hands on it quickly.

You will then need to have taken a complete backup of your data the night before all this happened so that you can restore your data after you have reinstalled Windows and all your programs. Do you have all these requirements at hand?

I thought not!

How Prepared Are You?

Should this sort of catastrophe happen to you how well prepared would you be to recover and continue as though nothing had happened? Major businesses like banks have plans in place to recover from these catastrophes, and their plans are usually implemented as trial runs just so they can know that they could recover should the unthinkable happen.

If you have important data, and you would need to recover quickly from this sort of disaster, just how well would you cope? If your computer contains your children's VCE assignments could you help them get their assignments back in time for assessment?

All computer users should be prepared for the total loss of their data and programs. This loss could be caused by a virus, a fire (relevant at this time of a really hot summer) or a theft of their computer. This story is a wake-up call for those of you who are convinced that there will never be a need to take precautions against a ransom attack.

Further Information

Nothing this week.