Radio Days – 2013-06-15

Tip of the Week – Buying the Right Program

Many programs some in a number of versions. I think particularly of programs like SyncBack and QuickBooks. I have often been to see clients struggling with a program like QuickBooks EasyStart when a slightly more expensive program like QuickBooks Accounting would do all that they need (and more).

I am reminded of a saying that I heard many years ago. It was attributed to a Spanish man who was giving advice to his son:

> *My son, you will never be rich enough to be able to afford cheap things.*

Using a cheap program when a slightly more expensive program will do a better job is the sort of *Penny Wise, Pound Foolish* action which can drive people to madness. I remember the treasurer of a small organisation who was using QuickBooks EasyStart and getting more and more frustrated because it would not do what he wanted to do. He rang me and I installed the trial version of QuickBooks Accounting then converted his data to the new program. I then showed him that, when using QuickBooks Accounting, he could do everything that he needed to do with ease.

He made two phone calls to get permission from board members to buy the more expensive program and this permission was given willingly. We then did a full upgrade to the new QuickBooks version and all his problems were solved.

These problems, which had plagued him and his board for a year or more, were solved as if by magic with an upgrade to the better version. Please remember that the cheaper version of a program is only there to satisfy those for whom *Free* is the only satisfactory price.

Sometimes *Free* comes at too high a price!

Keep Your Data: Make Backups

This week I had a call from a new client who had lost everything. The family's old computer had died, and with it had gone all the family's photos, not to mention all their emails, all their homework, all their music and all their videos. She had bought a new Windows 8 computer and asked me to set it up so that everybody could use it.

This was a simple task so we talked as I worked.

Windows 7 on Windows 8

The first thing that was really annoying her about this new version of Windows (so different from the Windows XP that she and her family were used to) was the lack of a Start button. I was able to fix this easily given the programs which are available to replace the Windows 7 Start button on Windows 8. The program that I installed was *Classic Shell* which gives a neat Windows 7-like look to Windows 8.

This means that Windows 8 now has a Start button (which can close Windows easily) and, perhaps even more important, it now starts into the familiar Windows 7 screen rather than the standard Windows 8 screen which confuses so many users.

I recommend this program.

Backup

I asked her if she would like me to create a backup system so that all the family's new data would be saved to an external backup. She eagerly agreed and even produced an external hard disc which I could use as a backup medium.

I asked her why she had not created a backup system before and she replied that she had not known how to do that. I meet too many people who give the same answer. It always saddens me to hear that people are prepared to lose all their precious photos and other memories just because they do not know how to do what they need to do to create a backup system.

My client was amazed at just how quick and easy it is to create a backup system. I used my favourite backup program, SyncBack, which I downloaded from its website. I installed the free version as it had all the features which she and her family needed.

Using SyncBack it took me fifteen minutes to create a new backup system for her family: a backup system which would only take one or two minutes a day to do. I informed her that the first backup would take a bit longer on a new backup medium (USB stick or external hard disc) because the first backup always copies everything whereas later backups only copy the new and changed files.

I showed her how to use it: just a double-click on an icon on her desktop! She promised that she would do the backup every week and I believe her.

Emails

Later I was asked to setup a new email program because she had lost access to her emails as a result of the crash. Because the Outlook Express team has been disbanded, the replacement Microsoft program is Windows Mail. Windows Mail is part of the pack of programs called Windows Essentials. You do not need to install all of the programs in the Windows Essentials' pack: I chose to install just Mail because there are better free alternatives for the other members of this pack.

The Windows Essentials' pack is a free download from the Microsoft website and is quite easy to install. Once installed it is easy to create an email account with Windows Mail: for most people you just need your name (which most people know!), your email username and your password. The rest is added automatically.

After setting-up her email account all her existing emails were downloaded. All I then did was send an email to her address then reply to it when the original one arrived. This tests that you have set everything up correctly.

The next step was to add the family's emails to the backup. This was an easy step because my preferred backup program, SyncBack from 2 Bright Sparks, makes updating a backup system very easy. All I had to do was add the new backup for the emails to SyncBack then insert it into the backup routine. Both processes took about ten minutes.

One very useful feature of SyncBack is the ability to delete from a backup all files which have been deleted from the source. Because I used this in the email backup I was able to ensure that deleted emails which were on the backup disc were kept for two weeks just in case they had been deleted in error. This will make it easy for my client to recover emails which have been deleted in error.

I explained to my client that the shortest time span is one *Oh No A Second!* This is the time which people take when they realise that they have deleted something in error: I am sure that you know exactly what I mean!

Business Backup

The next thing that I discovered was that, like so many wives, my client was doing the books for her husband's business. I also discovered that she was not doing backups for her business data which was even more valuable than her family's photos. This meant that the next step was to create another backup for the business computer. I installed SyncBack only to discover it was running Windows XP with Service Pack 2 (SP2) and that SyncBack needed SP3.

Because this computer was not attached to the internet I went back to her family computer and downloaded Service Pack 3. This is quite a large download (about 350 MB) so took about fifteen minutes. While we waited for this I checked just how much data needed to be backed up and realised that this meant that she would need a larger USB stick for the backup.

Once I had installed SP3 I ran the SyncBack backup to test that everything was working. As far as we could tell it worked perfectly: all the data that would fit on the memory stick had done so and the rest had been displayed as an error using her default web browser. As she had not downloaded any other browser this was Internet Explorer. All the errors (data files which would not fit on a memory stick which was too small) were displayed so that she could see what happened when an error occurred.

SyncBack SE

The version of SyncBack which I installed on my client's computer is the free version. There is another, more powerful, version which add a number of useful extras. The extra feature which I use allows me to keep a number of versions of all my files so that I can go back to an earlier version if I have made a mistake. This, of course, assumes that I have made all the needed backups!

You can also set SyncBack SE to do a backup at certain times, or at certain intervals, so that all your data are protected. This is a very powerful tool if your data are important for your business.

One option which I used for another client was to let SyncBack create backup copies of all his important data at regular intervals. These backups were compressed with a password so that there were safer. The reason for this is that the compressed backups were then uploaded to Dropbox, also at regular intervals, so that his really important data were truly safe.

MYOB Rollovers

As an aside to this visit, I noticed that her accountant was not keeping copies of her old data files when he rolled my client's MYOB data files over for the new financial year. This meant that, if the Tax Office were to audit the business, they would not be able to see the required seven years' worth of business data. This lack of data could easily lead to massive fines and penalties.

My way of solving this problem is to make a new file each year with the current financial year as a suffix to the file name so that each year's data can be accessed with just a few mouse clicks. This will keep you, your accountant and the Tax Office happy.

Further Information

SyncBack	www.2brightsparks.com
Windows Mail	www.microsoft.com
SyncBack Backup	www.2brightsparks.com
Dropbox	www.dropbox.com