Radio Days – 2013-07-13

Tip of the Week – What Is That Attachment?

During the week I had a client who asked me to update her copy of the free program called Adobe Acrobat Reader. I asked her why she wanted me to do that and her answer was that she could not open attachments from a regular contact and her daughter had told her that her copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader was too old so needed updating.

Like many children, her daughter does not know as much as she thinks! I was also reminded of one of my favourite quotes:

> *For every complex problem there is invariably a simple solution which does not work!*

Program Used

After a bit of investigation it turned out that the problem was not with my client's copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader at all. The problem was that the sender of the emails was using a most unusual program: OpenOffice Writer. OpenOffice is one of those free programs which was supposed to make Microsoft Word redundant because it was supposed to be so much better than Word. There is also a number of other programs in the OpenOffice suite: a spreadsheet which is supposed to rival Excel, a database which is supposed to rival Access, a presentation program which is supposed to rival PowerPoint and two other programs which have no equivalent in Microsoft Office.

Despite all this there are very few Windows users who use OpenOffice: the majority choice is one of the versions of Microsoft Office. This can become quite cheap if you have a student or teacher (at primary, secondary or tertiary level) because there are generous discounts for these people. I have first-hand knowledge of this because I bought Microsoft Office 2010 for my TAFE studies and the student price was less than the normal price for just one program in the suite.

For this reason I suggest that you only buy the student version if you or one of your children is a student or teacher. If you do not qualify you will just be wasting your money because you need to prove that you are a student or teacher before you can get your installation key for the programs which you bought.

For those who do not have a student or teacher in the family (or among friends!) you can get Microsoft Office Home & Student with Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote for much less that the business world can because these versions are not licenced for commercial use.

Solutions

There are a number of solutions. The obvious one would be to install OpenOffice just to open these documents. This is a waste of my client's download limit so I took the other option. I asked my client's colleague to send the attachments as PDF files. This is done in a number of ways.

- The first way is to use the built-in function in OpenOffice to export a Writer document as a PDF file. From the menu select *File » Export as PDF* to create a PDF document from a Writer document. You can then attach this PDF document to an email in the normal way. Your readers will thank you for making their life easier!
- Download and install one of the free PDF creator programs. My favourite is Bullzip PDF printer, and many of my clients like PDFCreator. Both of these programs are free and just need to be downloaded and installed. They then work like a printer: you just select your PDF printer rather than the normal paper printer. You can then attach this PDF file to an email as you normally do.

There is another solution: buy a copy of Word and use that. Even if you do this it is better to send an attachment as a PDF because that is what people expect, so it is easier for them to handle this type of attachment.

What Should You Update?

A recent client was feeling that he should get a new computer because he was having great difficulty working with a colleague on a major project. The project involved a number of the programs in Microsoft's Office suite. The problem was caused by a difference in the version which he had and the version which his colleague had. His Office 2007 was more than good enough for the work which he needed to do, but when he was working on a file which had been produced in PowerPoint 2010 he could not access parts of the presentation.

The presentations which had been started in PowerPoint 2010 would not open correctly in his PowerPoint 2007. This meant that the collaboration was being held up while he worked on his colleague's computer.

The problem began to unravel when he decided to buy a new computer. This was unnecessary because he had completely misdiagnosed the problem. He had somehow managed to assume that buying a new computer with Windows 7 or Windows 8 would solve this problem with the way that his copy of PowerPoint opened his colleague's presentations. He was convinced that the problem was with his computer which was running Windows Vista.

This is a similar misconception to that held by my other client who was told that she needed to update her copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader to read attachments which came with emails from a member of a group. I am not sure just how to help people discover what happens to cause a problem, but it seems to me that solving problems is not a skill that many people can use confidently.

A common problem that many people face is working out which program does what. When I mention different web browsers many people look as though I have been touched by the sun. There is no comprehension that different types of program do different types of things.

As an example, here is a list of the common tasks which people do on computers and the names of one or more programs which do a particular task.

Task	*Program(s)*
Work with documents	Microsoft Word
Send & receive emails	Outlook, Windows Mail
Work with lists and numbers	Microsoft Excel
Browse the internet	Internet Explorer, Opera, Firefox, Chrome
Work with photographs	Picasa, Photoshop Express, IrfanView

If you find that you are not sure what a particular program in the list above actually does then you can use the internet to see what that program does. If you use a good browser you just need to type the name give above and you will see a number of links, one of which will take you to either the program's website or another site which will explain what the program does.

Please remember that you need to find the correct problem to solve. If you skip this step you will go grey very rapidly as you chase imaginary problems round the mulberry bush. There is nothing quite as frustrating as chasing a problem which is not there! Not only is chasing a non-existent problem frustrating but this sort of chase could easily lead you to a combination of madness and penury.

Before you start chasing the wrong problem down the wrong rabbit hole please stop and take some time to find out what the problem really is. Taking the time to do this may well save both your sanity and your bank balance.

This example shows just how far you can go off the rails when you confuse wishful thinking with solving problems. If you have ever seen a child becoming worried because he or she can see monsters in the dark bedroom you will know just how your fears are manifesting themselves.

Please stop for a moment to work out whether you are solving the correct problem before you send yourself mad or broke!

Further Information

OpenOffice	www.openoffice.org
Bullzip PDF printer	www.bullzip.com
PDFCreator	www.pdfforge.org/pdfcreator