Radio Days – 2013-09-07

Discussion - When Things Go Wrong

During the week I had a call from a client who stated that he could not send emails. When I asked him what he could do on the internet he stated that he could receive emails and access the internet, so I was really confused about the problem. I used my travel time to think about the problem but to no avail: the more that I looked at his problem seemed, the more that it seemed to defy both gravity and the laws of physics.

When I arrived at his office I asked him to show me how he received emails and he showed me. He was using one of my favourite programs: MailWasher. He could receive emails using MailWasher but this did not involve his email program, so did not really count as receiving emails. His email program, Microsoft Outlook, would not even open. As soon as you clicked on the Outlook icon it came up with a message which stated that his access to his email account was not working and that he had to contact his administrator. He looked to me to be his administrator, and I was stumped.

I asked him when he had last been able to send or receive emails using Outlook and he stated that he had done so the previous day. I asked him what he had done since then and he said that he had done nothing. This was the answer that I had expected: so it told me nothing!

Checking for the Problem

Still at a loss as to what could be causing the problem – I suspected that his registry had been corrupted - I ran another of my favourite programs: CCleaner. It was a recent version – although not the latest – and it showed that the registry had no errors. Another dead end!

I had come to head-scratching time. Outlook would not run and there were no obvious errors with his registry (a common source of unexpected errors) so I did the next best thing: I turned his computer off then removed the power cord. This action has resolved many problems in the past.

After restarting his computer again the problem was still there, to my – and his – dismay. I thought about reinstalling Microsoft Office but he had lost access to the installation disc. This seems to be a common problem.

What I have found in the past is that two people will share the cost of a version of Office then install it on both their computers. The two friends had now parted because the owner of the disc had got a job in another state so the disc was not available. This did not augur well.

I was still stumped!

Recover from Backup

The next solution which I thought about was recovering an older copy of his Outlook data file from his backup. He had not done a backup for quite some time so I told him that he could lose some months' emails, but that it may be the only way to go. He agreed that he would accept this outcome if it meant that he could have access to his emails as they were really important for his business.

He also promised that he would do backups more frequently!

So that no data would be lost I renamed his current Outlook data file. This meant that his old Outlook data file would still be there, with all its current emails, if we managed to solve the problem. The next step was to restore the old version of his Outlook data file into the folder with the current version of his Outlook data file.

This is when things became interesting: I could not restore his Outlook data file! There was not enough free space on his hard disc! This is something completely unexpected as most computers have so much free space that I do not expect to see a full hard disc. However, this is what had happened.

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The next step was to rename his old Outlook data file back to its original name. Once this was done it was time to remove at least one file to make enough space on his disc so that Outlook could run as normal.

This is important because Windows expects that there will be at least 15% of a hard disc free so that the NTFS file system can operate efficiently. If there is less than 15% free space your computer can display all sorts of problems.

Problems like an email program not working!

Making Space

The first step to making space was to empty the recycle bin. My client stated that everything in the recycle bin was disposable so I emptied the bin. This tool an unexpected length of time because the recycle bin was full: right-up full!

Because my client used Internet Explorer as his internet browser the next step was to ensure that he was not using too much space for Internet Explorer's working area. Many computers are setup to use well over 1 GB of working space when 32 MB is more than enough. I set Internet Explorer's working space back to a more reasonable 32 MB and then, after working for a while, his hard disc had enough space to allow Outlook to open. This meant that my client could now use his email program!

There was still work to do.

The next step was to update his copy of CCleaner then use it to remove all the junk that had accumulated on his hard disc. This freed-up some 5 GB of disc storage and my client was amazed that his computer could speed up so much. We discussed the advantages of doing regular maintenance on his hard disc at least twice a year. In Victoria I suggest to my clients that they should do a clean-up when we change to and from Summer Time in October and April. These two dates are six months apart and a good time to do a spring-clean of hard disc.

I then updated Defraggler and ran it to analyse his hard disc. This showed that he now had over 15% free space and that he had an enormous quantity of fragmented files. I suggested that he ran if overnight to start the defragmenting process. I explained to him that it always took a number of goes to defragment a really fragmented disc, and that he would have to run Defraggler more than once to get his disc into tip-top shape.

All in all a good day's work, and a client who could get on with his work. This is a reminder that hard discs can fill up, even if I do not expect them to do so.

Is your hard disc full?

Further Information

MailWasher Free	www.mailwasher.net	
MailWasher Pro	www.mailwasher.com	
SyncBack	www.2brightsparks.com	
CCleaner	www.piriform.com	
Defraggler	www.piriform.com	