Radio Days – 2014-01-11

Discussion – Christmas Chaos

During the Christmas Silly Season I have had to sort out a number of problems with all sorts of computers. This is a discussion about the worst offenders: I have disguised their identities to protect the guilty. If you are listening to the show you will know who you are!

I have mentioned a number of problems here. Please note that some of my clients had only one problem while others had more than one. They are all here as a warning to you, and to everybody that you know, of the things which can happen

No Anti-Virus Program

One client rang to say that her computer was too slow and could I please fix it. Again, the words which I dread when I hear them from a client: *I know that this will only take you five minutes*. This information always heralds a complicated task, and this job was no exception!

The first problem was that my client had allowed her son (who was aged in the dangerous years between 12 and 18) to install some programs which would, in his words, *speed things up*. During his ministrations he managed to download and install many of the dodgy programs which purport to fix all sorts of problems.

The first thing was to check the status of the computer's anti-virus program. This check revealed that there was no anti-virus program! Not having an anti-virus program is one of my pet hates as it allows all sorts of stupid actions to be performed with no checks. So, first stop: install a free anti-virus program. I chose Avast as I believe that it is one of the best free anti-virus programs available at the moment. I also installed Malwarebytes Free to complement Avast. After installing and updating both programs I let them both run a full scan of the computer. I allowed this to run overnight. Yes: a full scan of a hard disc can take a long time when you run both programs at the same time but it is much quicker than running them one after the other. The good thing about this is that you can get on with your life rather than watching numbers on your computer's screen increasing as time goes on. Watching grass grow is more fun!

Too Many Programs

The next step was to find and uninstall all the unwanted programs. First find the unwanted programs. One way to do this was to use CCleaner. This program has an excellent series of tools: these are found under the *Tools* tab on the left-hand window. The tool which I used is *Startup*: this showed me all the programs which start with Windows. Of these programs, a large proportion needed to be removed from the computer.

The easiest way to remove these programs was to use Windows' own utility for removing programs. This is found in the *Control Panels* under *Programs and Features*. If you keep CCleaner's window open together with the *Programs and Features* window then you can switch between them quickly by holding the *Alt* down then bouncing on the *Tab* key. This is the standard way to switch between open windows and is one of the tricks which far too few people seem to know.

Now you can uninstall each of the programs found in CCleaner's *Startup* window. This, after you have rebooted your computer, should make it much faster. My client's computer was so much faster after all this TLC that I almost could not believe my eyes! She was happy with the results.

Backup Not Working

Two clients found, much to their surprise, that their backup programs were not working. This was a most unwelcome surprise for one of those clients, in particular, because his reasonably-

new computer had killed its hard disc. He believed that he had a backup of all the important data on his hard disc so was devastated to discover that his accounting program had not been backed up to his USB stick for over a year. He had also lost his family tree data because, as far as we could determine, it had never been backed up.

We managed to find many photographs, many videos and many other documents which were scattered over about twenty CDs which had been burnt over the years, but the all-important accounting data and family tree data were lost. There's a possibility that some members of his family might have copies of the family tree data, but there is no chance that anybody else has a copy of his financial data.

Shutting the door after the horse had bolted, I installed SyncBack and created a backup system which will ensure that all the data in his Documents, Pictures and Videos folders are copied to a USB stick every time that he runs it.

My second client had SyncBack installed but the setup was wrong. I was there for another reason and noticed that the backup ran far too quickly so checked then corrected the setup. Now her backup runs like clockwork and copies all the important files to her USB stick.

It pays to check that your backup is working and that all the files which you need to be on your backup after a catastrophe are, in fact, on your backup medium.

Removing USB Devices

Far too many people just pull a USB device from their computer when they want to remove it. Most of the time this will work, but there are far too many times when a client has deleted all files on their backup device by doing this. If you have ever had to comfort somebody who had lost all their backup data because they had just pulled their USB device out of their computer then you, too, would be just a little more careful.

The Toby-approved method of removing USB devices is to click (with the left mouse button) the icon in the task bar (next to the clock) which shows a USB stick with a green click. This click shows a list of all the USB devices which can be removed. Now click on the device which you want to remove and you will get one of two messages: either the device is busy or it is safe to remove the device. If you remove the device before you get the *safe to remove* message you will probably delete all the information on that device.

You have been warned!

Lost Program Discs

One client had received a new computer for Christmas and this meant that it had to be setup correctly. He had received an anti-virus program with the computer so there was no problem there, but he did not have his program discs so that the programs which had been on his old computer could not be installed. I managed to find online some free programs which would do the work of his old programs, but it shows the importance of keeping all the program discs for programs which you use often or, even worse, on which you rely for some vital function like accounting!

She asked a common question: *Why can't you just copy the programs from my old computer to my new one?* This question shows that so many people do not understand what happens when a program is installed on a computer. The obvious things occur: the program files are copied from the CD to the hard disc and placed correctly. However, behind the scenes, much more happens.

All programs create entries in a special Windows file called the *Registry*. This complex file has lots of information about the program which you are installing, and some program just create a few entries whereas others create some thousands of entries in the Registry. If you try to do this by hand you are guaranteed to make a mistake and this means that your new program does not work.

The only way to install a program is using the CD provided by the program's manufacturer: anything else will leave you with a boat-anchor of a program.

Slow Internet

A client had a problem with their internet connection. Because of their location they have satellite internet and everything was going haywire in the connections. Sometimes they could get their emails, but sometimes they could not. Sometimes a YouTube video would play well but at other times the playback would stutter as the video came down the wires (so to speak) far too slowly to keep up with the player.

There was nothing that I could do because it was obviously a problem at the other end. My clients had rung their ISP (Internet Service Provider) but nothing had been achieved. I rang, and the person to whom I spoke was able to find a problem with their connection. This was soon fixed and now emails were hooning down the wires from the satellite and YouTube videos were playing at their full speed.

I showed my clients the area in the download bar which displayed just how far ahead the video had been buffered and they were delighted: they now had a buffer which was large enough to keep the video flowing if, for some reason, the satellite was unable to deliver for a short time.

They are now delighted!

Measuring Internet Speed

There are two main ways to measure the speed of your internet connection. The first way is to go to one of the websites which measures your download speed. This gives you an indication of your internet speed at that moment in time. If you run another test just a few moments later you will get a different result. One example of this sort of website is *Speedtest*.

Another, and more reliable, method is to install a program on your computer which will give you a longer-term, and so more accurate, measure of your internet speed. My preferred program for this is DUMeter: this costs USD 30. A cheaper program is NetWorx which is free but does not give quite as much information as DUMeter.

Further Information

Avast	www.avast.com
AVG	www.avgfree.com.au
Avira	www.avira.com
Bitdefender	www.bitdefender.com.au
Comodo	www.antivuris.comodo.com
MSE	www.microsoft.com/mse
Malwarebytes	www.malwarebytes.org
Spybot	www.safer-networking.org
SUPERAntiSpyware	www.superantispyware.com
CCleaner	www.piriform.com
Defraggler	www.piriform.com
SyncBack	www.2brightsparks.com
Speedtest	www.speedtest.net
DUMeter	www.hageltech.com
NetWorx	www.softperfect.com