Tales from the Terminal Room
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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTTR) is a monthly newsletter, with the exception of July and August which are published as a single issue. TFTTR includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; updates to the RBA Web site Business Sources and other useful resources; dealing with technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications.

I should have known better! In the October issue of Tales from the Terminal Room, I related how I had been deluged with thousands of unsolicited emails. I foolishly gave an example which contained the dreaded "V" word and email filters across the networks immediately sprang into action.

A few were kind enough to bounce back the newsletter with a report telling me why they did not think the content was of a suitable nature. These included words that indicated whether or not some exchange of monetary tokens was required in order to peruse information provided by publishers, how such transactions may be conducted (for example as a part of an ongoing contract, or through the mediation of a third party institution issuing plastic material specifically designed for the purpose. And providing you, the reader, with instructions as to how to initiate or terminate your relationship with us was also frowned upon. I haven't a clue how I am supposed to review electronic resources without using some of these words and phrases, nor what terms can be safely employed to tell readers how to subscribe and subscribe.

Some bounce reports gave us the intended recipients' email addresses and we were able to contact those directly about the problem. Others gave nothing away so some of you may be missing one or more issues. Of course you will not be aware of the problem if you have not received this issue ☹

If your email filters persistently refuse to admit TFTTR into your inbox, archives are on the Web site at http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/ and, starting from October 2003, a PDF version is available both on the Web site and via email. If you would prefer to be emailed the PDF version instead of plain text, send a message to tfttr@rba.co.uk with a subject line of 'PDF version please'. We will do the necessary at our end. New subscribers can choose Plain Text or PDF when using the form at http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/.

In this issue:

- Yahoo! opts in users to marketing mail
- British Library launches Research Service
- This email has expired
- Information resources
    - BvD adds ODIN (information on Nordic companies)
    - Free M&A fact sheet from BvD Zephyr
    - Foodstat
    - Lawbore
    - Tom's Law - Legal Documents Online
- These things are sent to try us!
    - Digital disaster in the Dales
- Gizmo of the Month
    - Zap spyware with Spybot

Yahoo! opts in users for marketing mail

Some readers may recall that in April 2002 we reported on Yahoo's unilateral decision to opt-in its members to receive marketing messages. They did this by creating a host of new categories and automatically checking the "Yes please" boxes!

Well, Yahoo has sent round an email saying that they have not yet implemented those changes for all of their registered members. It goes onto to say that:

"Because of your previous account settings, Yahoo! has not yet sent you marketing communications under the new program. Before we do, we want to remind you how to set your preferences, and let you know what has changed and what is not changing."

From January 1, 2004, Yahoo! will begin to send you messages, via email or postal mail, about their own products and services unless you tell them to go away.

They do say, though, that you will not be sent messages on behalf of their marketing partners if you have already opted out.

So, if you do **not** want to receive these messages, get thee hence to your account and check your Marketing Preferences settings. And, if I were you, I'd do it a couple of days before and after January 1st just to make sure they have not be re-set to the default "Yes".

British Library launches Research Service

The British Library is launching the British Library Research Service on 2 December at Online 2003.

The service will specialise in patents, biology, medicine, chemistry, engineering and technology, companies and markets, and official publications.

More information can be found on the Research Service website at
http://www.bl.uk/services/information/research.html

This email has expired

There has been a story going round that Microsoft have launched an email tool that allows a sender to set messages to self-destruct after a chosen period. The added functionality in Outlook 2003, which is in its Information Rights Management system, is also said to allow senders to prevent forwarding or printing of an email and restrict who can read it.

This caused an uproar in organisations who pointed out that, for legal and regulatory reasons, many of then must be able to print and save electronic correspondence. Furthermore, under UK Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation there are times when there is a legal obligation to disclose records on demand.

It turned out that part of the story was not true. The information rights management function **does** give the sender the ability to limit which recipients can open, forward and print emails and documents. It does **not**, according to Microsoft, have a self-destruct option. After a specified time an email does not vanish – it "expires".

I confess that when I read this I had images of John Clees performing a Dead Email sketch along the lines of the famous Monty Python Dead Parrot!

Someone with administrative rights can still retrieve the "expired" data from a central server. So that's alright then. If a vital document attempts to go and push up the daisies, you can ask your already overworked IT bod to revive it and nail it to your inbox folder. They'll be really pleased to oblige, especially when you and all your colleagues turn up several times a day with your dead parrots - sorry - expired emails.

I get the impression that this one has not been adequately thought through.

Information Resources

Company Financials

BvD adds ODIN
Bureau van Dijk (BvD), has launched ODIN, a new product containing information on companies in the Nordic region. ODIN covers

http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/archives/2003/nov2003.shtml

Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway and contains information on 600,000 companies. The company reports are in the same standardised format as on BvD's pan-European database, AMADEUS, to facilitate cross-border searching and analysis.

In addition to company reports ODIN, also contains news, market research and has links to M&A data on BvD's ZEPHYR, which contains details of mergers and acquisitions deals worldwide. Stock data is provided for listed companies.

The company information comes from four expert local data providers. Full analysis options are available and include the facility to view the results of searches on maps of the region.

More information on ODIN and how to obtain a free trial can be found at http://www.bvdep.com/

Mergers & Acquisitions

Free M&A Fact Sheet from BvD Zephyr
Bureau van Dijk (BvD) and Zephus, the co-publishers of ZEPHYR, the M&A research tool, have joined forces to produce a monthly fact sheet of M&A deal information. Published on the first working day of the month the fact sheet is a summary of recent deal activity. It compares the latest month to the year to date.

The fact sheet is provided in PDF and the raw data is available in Excel format. Both versions can be accessed from http://zephyr.bvdep.com/ by selecting the "statistics" link.

Market Research and Statistics

Foodstat http://www.foodstat.com/
A new Web site called Foodstat has been launched providing statistics and trends in the food and drinks sector. The information comes from RTS-Resource Ltd, an International food and drink industry consultants.

The new service provides forecast market trends, historic consumption data, projected market values, per capita consumption statistics, and country by country comparisons. The data is made available in "bite-size" chunks and there is a free sample

on the Web site to give you an idea of the type and amount of information you get for your money. Priced pay-as-you-go service.

Legal Resources

Lawbore http://www.lawbore.net/

Created by Emily Allbon, Law Librarian and Andy Bromley, an LLB 3rd year student , Lawbore is City University's own legal portal. The site was conceived as a way of making internet research easier for students and encouraging the use of a wide range of sites to complement specific subjects. Lawbore is tailored to City students but it is useful to anyone with a legal interest.

The information is organised into topics, for example EC, Employment, Environment and as well as a general summary each has a Top 5 Web sites, Top 5 Articles and Top 5 Hot Docs.

Tom's Law - Legal Documents Online
http://www.tomslaw.com/

This site is intended to serve the public interest by helping smaller companies and their investors, and provides potential drafts for various company documents and contracts.

The site has been set up by Tom Mackay who, amongst other things, was head of the Legal Department and a Director of 3i PLC, and head of the Legal Department of the London Stock Exchange where he gave legal advice to the primary and secondary markets. Full details of his expertise and qualifications are given on the Web site under the Contact link.

Most of the standard documents are to do with setting up a company or related to funding and investment. There are several areas, though, that are useful to we lesser mortals who are either employees or acting in a consultancy capacity to companies. These include confidentiality agreements, Intellectual Property contracts and contracts for junior and senior employees.

But the one that we all hope we shall never receive is the letter to an employee when the company is in financial difficulties.

These things are sent to try us!

Digital disaster in the Dales

A colleague and very good friend of mine, who lives way up in Yorkshire Dales, recently became seriously disillusioned with the customer support of a major computer manufacturer. For the purpose of this Tale, we shall call them Dingle Computers.

She works from home most of the time and is surrounded by beautiful countryside. But the magnificence of her surroundings did not make up for the two weeks of misery and frustration she endured trying to get her desktop computer repaired.

Day 1
I receive a phone call from my friend.

"Something really terrible has happened" she cried. "We had a power cut followed by a power surge and now my PC won't boot up properly"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It gets half way through loading windows and just sits there…".

"Oh dear," I sympathised. "Looks as though we shall have to reinstall the operating system."

".. and when I reboot I catch a glimpse of error messages about not being able to find various files and something about the registry missing."

[Definitely have to reinstall the operating system I thought]

"…and these funny wingding sort of characters appear on the splash screen when I switch the computer on."

[Gulp] I tried to hide the panic in my voice. "We could be looking at a problem with the motherboard" I said.

"Funny you should say that" she replied. "Two other people I've spoken to have said the same thing".

"OK," I said trying to remain calm. "Perhaps you should contact Dingle Computers?"

Day 2

Phoned my friend.

"Fat lot of good Dingle were!" she shouted "I'm sure I ended up speaking to a call centre in the beta quadrant of Alpha Centauri. Spent hours on the phone while the droid at the other end worked through his script. Didn't believe me when I suggested the motherboard. Said I just needed to download and run a 'flash bios' or something - but it didn't work"

"Then he/she/it suggested that I run the repair option from the recovery CD. That didn't make any difference either, but the options they told me to select didn't make sense."

So, I suggested I talk her through the "recovery options" over the phone. Victory seemed certain when the repaired Windows finished loading. Then it asked for her username and password. It refused to recognise her. No matter what we tried there was no way it was letting us in!

Back to the Dingle call centre. They said that they would send out an engineer to sort out the problem. It was Thursday and the earliest they could arrange was the following Wednesday.

Day 8

The engineer arrives, not from Alpha Centuari but via a local contractor.

He spends several hours "faffing about", as my friend put it, replaces the hard disk and reinstalls the operating system. My friend questions the rationale behind this, especially as we are going to have to reload several software packages and huge chunks of backed-up data. She was told "That's what it says on my job sheet so that's what I've got to do".

At least we could now load Windows and get past the log-on screen, but the wingding characters were still appearing on the splash screen.

Not on his job sheet so not his problem.

Day 9

My friend phones Alpha Centauri. There is still one potential major problem unresolved - wingdings on the boot up splash screen. She is told to rerun the flash bios. She humours the droid but the 'flash' makes no difference. They ignore her suggestion that it may be the motherboard and tell her that it is the CMOS battery. They are sending out a replacement to her by Intergalactic recorded delivery.

Day 10

The new CMOS battery arrives and is put in place. Not only does it make no difference to the splash screen, she now has a new error message telling her that the CMOS battery is low.

She phones Dingle. An engineer will be out the following Tuesday.

Day 14

Another engineer arrives, but not to replace the motherboard. First, he spots that the new CMOS battery is in upside down. [D'oh]. But putting it in the right way up makes no difference.

"Could it be the motherboard?" my friend suggests.

"I'll need to run some diagnostics" he says. Then phones home.

"OK - Dingle have told me to run some other diagnostics"

The diagnostics show - nothing! And the PC seems to be working, so everything is hunky dory as far as the engineer is concerned.

"But there are things on the splash screen that shouldn't be there. And you are not leaving until this is fixed," states my friend. "Could it be the motherboard?" She asks again.

The engineer phones home and is told to 'flash the BIOS' despite being told by my friend that we've already done that twice and it didn't work.

It didn't work.

"Why don't you replace the motherboard?"

He phones home.

"OK, lets try a new motherboard" he suggests as though it was his idea.

It works, the engineer is allowed to leave and I arrive on Day 15.

Day 15/16

I arrive in the Dales and we have two days of glorious sunshine. Pity I had to spend most of it indoors, but at least loading the software and restoring the data was relatively straightforward.

There were a few minor problems due to my friend now being set up as an administrator rather than a user on the PC. The "My documents" were in the wrong place but were quickly dragged across to the right one. And Pegasus Mail was downloading email into a completely different directory. But that, too, was easily fixed.

The moral of this Tale? There are three:

1. Have some form of power surge protection (which we did not but do now).

2. Make a regular back up of data and make sure that it works (we did and it did)

3. Do not assume that customer support, which has been out-sourced to Alpha Centauri, will come up with a correct diagnosis or fix the problem within 5 parsecs (2 weeks Earth time).

Gizmo of the Month

Zap spyware with Spybot

SpyBot Search and Destroy
http://security.kolla.de/

Has your PC started dialling up the Internet of its own accord? If you don't have any scheduled updates set up and your up to date virus checker says your computer is clean, you probably have a bad case of **spyware**.

Spyware is a term used to describe a program that surreptitiously monitors your actions or gathers information on your surfing

activities. The program is usually set up to "phone home" to deliver the information back to base. A lot of advertising supported software (adware) does this and it is a way for shareware authors to make money from a product other than by selling it. More worrying are the PC surveillance tools that monitor activity on a computer using techniques such as keystroke capture, snapshots, email logging and chat logging.

As no spyware detection tool is completely foolproof, many people regularly run two different programs, for example AdAware and SpyBot, on their PCs. (AdAware is already in our list of Gizmos of the Month).

As well as identifying and removing existing spyware on your PC, Spybot Search and Destroy can "immunise" your PC and alert you when spyware attempts to infiltrate your system. The program is free but donations are welcomed!

Note: If you are running software that is supported by advertisements, you may find that it no longer works when the ad part of the program is removed

More information on spyware in general can be found on the Spyware Guide Database at http://www.spywareguide.com/

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