

Editorial

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I get back from one of my trips abroad, plug my laptop in my LAN and find that I cannot access the Internet or my email. Everything was working okay before I went away and everything worked fine in the hotel abroad which had a wireless LAN, but back at the ranch it is a complete no-no. So I start fiddling with my settings; shutting down programs that have loaded at start-up without any problems for years, deactivating my firewall and all the other things that one does when slightly jet lagged and perhaps not thinking too clearly. My dial-up link continues to function as normal so I use that, in between sessions of trying to solve my broadband problem, to update my anti-virus software and access my email. After a few days my broadband email starts working, albeit on an very intermittent basis. As I know that my email uses my Internet settings I expect my Internet access to be restored on the same intermittent basis, but it will have none of it. I check with my neighbour, who uses the same broadband provider and local telephone exchange and his service is fine. But then he uses a Mac, so I start suspecting that this must be a Windows XP problem associated with the Sassa worm, even though I check for anti-virus updates every four hours and Windows updates daily (I know that this may seem over the top, but in my job you can't afford to let your guard down). To be on the safe side I re-check for critical updates (zilch), anti-virus updates (zilch) and do a complete virus scan (zilch).

So I contact the BT Yahoo support desk and after the usual wait go through the problem with a support person. I mention the intermittent email, the error message I receive when attempting to access the Internet, the fact that my dial-up works fine and that I am sitting behind a broadband router. He asks about the router and I give him all the details. He suggests renumbering the IP address that the router uses to access the BT Yahoo DNS server. I make the change he suggests to the IP address, but to no avail. I then plug into my USB port the old broadband modem that came with the original BT package and after downloading the updated driver (the original crashed the computer) everything works okay. As this modem gets the DNS IP address automatically I become convinced that either my router got fried in a thunderstorm that occurred whilst I was away or the DNS address is wrong. Either of these theories is supported by the fact that I can't get any of the other computers on the LAN to access the Internet either. I re-contact the support desk and ask whether they have changed the IP address of their DNS? Their response is that they haven't, so I try each IP address they give me in turn, but to no avail. I check the help page on their web site and the DNS addresses stated there agree with the ones provided by the support desk.

Totally frustrated I use my search engine for clues and find out that while I have been away BT Yahoo had changed their entire broadband infrastructure for security reasons, including the IP addresses of their Domain Name Servers, but

they haven't bothered to tell their customers! The web is alive with complaints. I should have searched it earlier Grrrrr! As none of the complainants provide the new DNS addresses, I email the BT support desk (I couldn't face the friendly, but useless staff at the other end of the 'phone) and receive an automatic response directing me to the FAQ part of their web site. I check this only find the old DNS addresses. The auto response does however, allow me to fill in a form describing my problem which I do, but pointing out that all I need is the new DNS addresses. I receive an auto reply which is the exact same message as the first time around! Totally frustrated I write how crazy this is and send it off only to receive the self-same auto response. Grrr again. So I use a bit of nowse and by using the old BT broadband modem and the ipconfig command I am able to see the DNS address that it is picking up. I program this into my router and lo and behold the Internet springs to life. The next day I receive an apologetic email from the support desk giving the address that I had already found.

I had now spent two weeks trying to solve the problem and the solution was a simple two minute change to the DNS address in my router! The arrogance (or incompetence) of BT Yahoo is staggering. To make a major infrastructure change without giving its customers a key piece of information is incompetence of a large order. The web complaints were indicating that 300,000 customers had been affected. If this figure is true and if each one of those customers was off the web for two weeks as I was, then the country incurred a total productivity loss of over 11,500 man years, plus the equivalent waste in management time in trying to solve the problem. A staggering total of around 23,000 wasted man years to UK plc. The fact that neither the support desk or the FAQs were aware of the problem and continued to give me wrong information over that period indicates a lack of decent change management.. I complained to the BT Chairman, Sir Christopher Bland and received an initial holding response followed up by a telephone call from someone at the BT Open World 'High Level Complaints' Team. I queried whether BT Yahoo was accredited to ISO 9000, but he didn't know. He couldn't answer my other questions either, but has said that he will get back to me. I will update you in the next edition.

To my own chagrin, my subsequent root cause analysis, which is something I do after every problem, showed that all the clues for an early diagnosis and solution were staring me in my face. First, I hadn't made any significant changes to my configuration while abroad as the hotel had an internal LAN with broadband connectivity through a router. The sole change had been to my email account to use my Net2Roam server because the ISP used by the hotel didn't allow relaying from my BT Yahoo account, but I had changed this back before connecting into my own LAN. The fact that none of my other computers could access the web (and none of their settings had altered) indicated either a router or a BT Yahoo problem. I was initially misled by the potential lightning strike, but I should have discounted that as soon as I started to get an intermittent email connection which pointed to a service infrastructure problem, rather than something at my end. The main clue however, was the Internet error message 'dnsserver error', but as

the support desk said that there were no problems with their DNS and also that the DNS address in my router was correct, I was misled into thinking that the problem was elsewhere. Next time I will check the web first to establish if other people have a similar problem and this brings me to my final point of this sorry saga. Why doesn't BT Yahoo check the web themselves on a regular basis, as an early warning indicator, that things are going off track? As an auditor I always check the complaints 'book' to ascertain whether the customers have any problems with the service being provided.

On to better things. Two follow-up articles in this edition. One from Greg Krehel dealing with creating a 'cast of characters' to help with your investigations and another from Priscilla Emery dealing with the importance of document management in business continuity planning. Both of these articles are continuations of themes in the last edition and will be continued into the next. We also have a great article on PDA security from Didi Barnes of First Base. Our new Chairman, Alex Brewer, re-establishes the message from the Chairman column and Colin Thompson from the BCS updates us on what is happening elsewhere in the Society. I have already used the new membership grades that Colin described in the last edition to nominate two IRMA Committee members for professional membership (you see there is some benefit from being a committee member). Celeste Rush, our Membership Secretary, provides an analysis of our membership which may be of interest to those of you of a demographic analysis bent.

Summer is here and the holiday period is almost upon us. Not for me however, as there is the Autumn edition to consider. Happy reading.