

Editorial

John Mitchell

John Ivinson who was involved with the early days of IRMA, then the Auditing By Computer SG, died a few months ago. John eventually became BCS President and was also the founding President of ISACA London Chapter. You can read an obituary elsewhere in this edition. It's been one of those quarters when things keep going wrong: Tax self assessment, VAT refunds, broadband speeds that aren't, poor configuration management killing people and the Electoral Commission stating that the Government should forget about electronic voting. Finally, there was an interesting comparison between the US and the UK on hospital waiting times. Strangely enough, I have been involved with all of these incidents. Perhaps it's my profession which makes me note control issues in much the same way as train spotters collect engine numbers.

First, a word of warning about the Revenue & Customs self assessment tax scheme. It cannot calculate twenty percent of an odd number for gains on UK life policies. When I confirmed this with their support desk they agreed there was a problem. That was two months ago as I write this and the problem remains. Moral of the story: always check the derived data from a calculation. Then I received a welcome, but unexpected cheque from the VAT side of the organisation. Straight into the bank while I investigated. I pay my VAT by direct debit so I assumed that I had been debited twice and the cheque was the refund. Not so. Another call extracted an apology. They had processed a batch of VAT returns twice and therefore must have debited me twice, hence the refund with apologies. Not so stated I and they eventually called back to agree. Could I now pay them some money please as they had only taken it once and the refund cancelled it out? Moral of the story: always check your correction controls just in case they don't.

For some time I have been using BT's up to 8 megabyte broadband. I have never, ever, achieved anything better than 1.5 megabyte which BT say is okay because they advertise "up to 8 megabyte". As far as my limited research has shown this can only be achieved if you are located right next door to an exchange and have a direct fibre link. At last Ofcom and the Advertising Standards people are beginning to take note after a damning report from the consumer group *Which?* Moral of the story: "up to" really equates to "up yours". Then the Electoral Commission published their report on the recent electronic voting pilots. Pretty damning all round and with a recommendation that the Government should sort out some fundamental issues before trying again. Regular readers of this column will be aware of my views on the subject and I have written to the Commission several times on the subjects of confidentiality, integrity and availability. Interestingly, it is not on these issues that the Government is likely to act, but the cost. At £800 per participating voter, it's hardly cost effective either. Moral of the story: simply getting people to vote is no good if you can't rely on the result.

The sad news that two patients had died as a result of a radiation overdose whilst undergoing cancer treatment reminded me that I had raised this as a potential issue in a recent lecture on data management. These devices are computer controlled and parameter driven. Moral of the story: get the parameter data wrong and people die. Finally, having spent numerous hours in various NHS queues I was interested to read that, in the US, after a hospital promised to see emergency patients within fifteen minutes of arrival, a competing hospital rolled out a programme promising two cinema passes if you are not attended to within thirty minutes. "Over the next five years you'll see this pretty much everywhere except in the smallest hospitals," said Rick Wade, spokesman for the American Hospital Association. I wonder what your dependents will get if you die while waiting? Moral of the story: competition is usually better than state ownership in reducing waiting times.

In this issue we have an article from Glen Gray on XBRL. None the wiser of its importance, then read the article? Craig Write discusses the problems associated with document destruction and we have our regular contributions from Ross Palmer our Chairman, Bob Ashton our Oceana correspondent and Andrea Simmons updating us on the Security Strategic Forum.