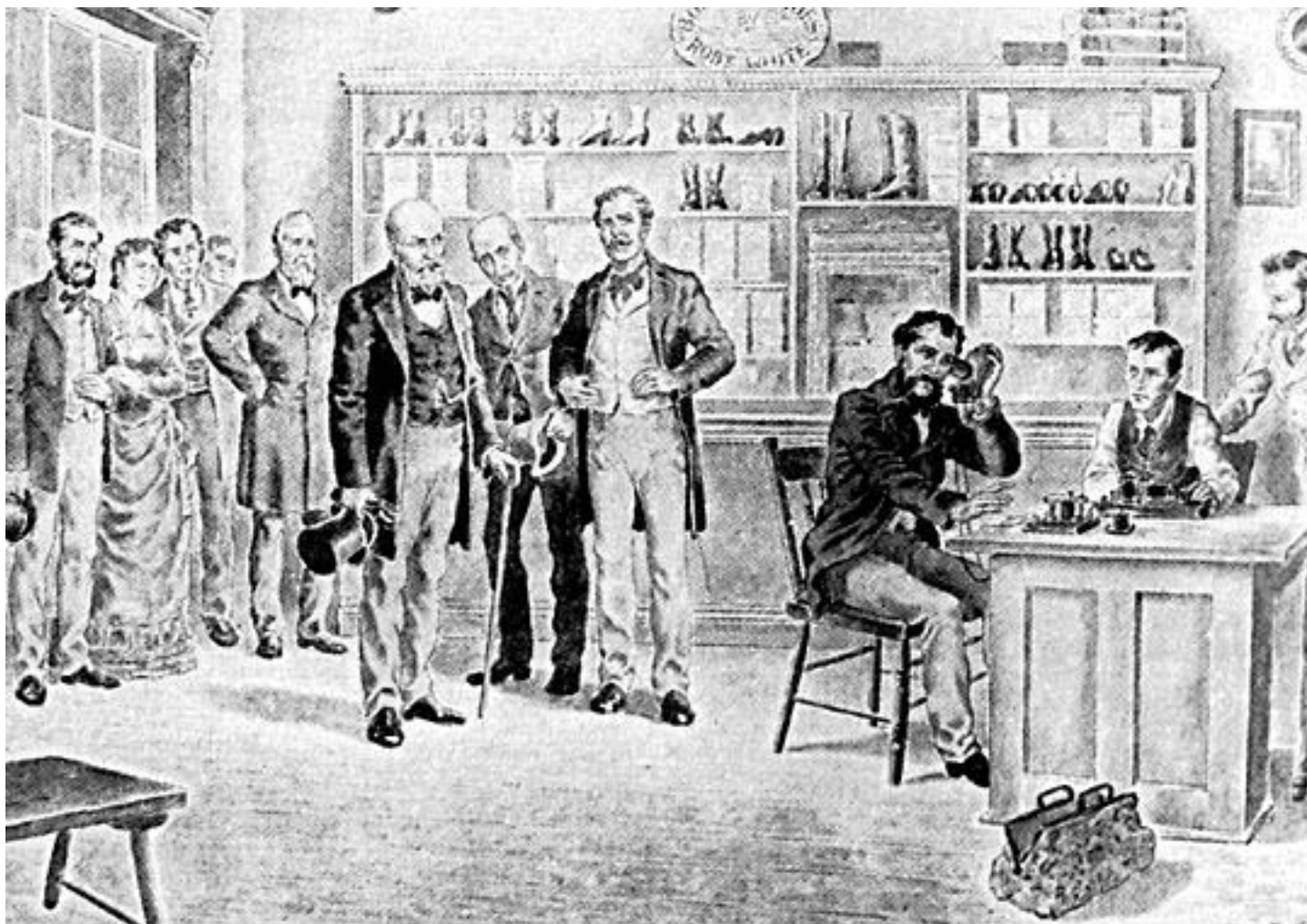


Voice Over IP (VOIP)



How the internet is going to lower your business costs...

PLUS

- Backing up your computer's hard disc.
- How to Surf the web safely with Internet Explorer.
- Is MSN chat turning your PC into a SPAM zombie?

VOIP, the telephone enters the internet era. By Stephen Bungay

When you think about it, I mean when you take the Internet, cable TV, satellite TV, Satellite Radio, cell phones, MP3 music and all the other technological goodies we use today and render them all down to the basics, the Internet was made possible as soon as Mr. Watson heard a cry for help from Alexander Graham Bell, and almost every other electronic gizmo owes its existence to the lowly light-bulb and mathematics. Yes there are things in that big pile of technology like the transistor and the micro-chip, but even they are replacements for the vacuum tube and that, really, is just a fancy light-bulb; which is a discussion beyond the scope of this article.

At some point in the not too distant past someone looked at all the stuff flying across the Internet and asked the question "why can't we run telephones on this"? Brilliant! Today we have Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) which allows people to talk to each other at the same cost as your monthly high speed connection, and it is this which can save you or your business a lot of money.

LONG DISTANCE COSTS

Here in Barrie Ontario we're a mere 60 miles (100 Km) from Canada's largest city, yet the basic long distance fees for our phone calls are 38 cents a minute. That rate is for station to station calls where the distance is 41-80 miles between stations (source www.bell.ca). What this means is that people in Barrie who talk for 100 minutes a month to people in Toronto, are paying virtually the same amount of money as someone who has their PC monitoring a web-cam of the traffic in downtown Sydney Australia 24/7. It just doesn't make sense then that merely talking to someone who is (geographically speaking) just down the road, should be so expensive.

Enter companies like Vonage, who will piggyback their service on top of your high speed Internet service and allow you to make telephone calls to anywhere in Canada and the U.S.A. for \$39.00 a month (source www.Vonage.ca). Bearing mind that this \$39.00 is on top of your basic telephone costs AND your high speed connection, a monthly bill of about \$120.00 a month (not including taxes), would allow your small business to make as many long distance calls as you need and send big documents with full colour photos embedded in them to clients in the far flung corners of the earth, or perhaps just across town.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

No I don't mean currency exchange rates. In Barrie, using VOIP, it's a simple matter to have a telephone number with a Toronto area code (also known as the Toronto Exchange). If your business has customers calling from Toronto on a regular basis, or you want to tap into that market without having the expenses of actually being there, then a VOIP telephone service might be a perfect match. In years gone by, to obtain such a "foreign exchange" would have broken the bank. The Internet makes it inexpensive and easy.

TAX TIME

Because VOIP will run on any high speed connection a small home based business might be tempted to run it through their residential telephone line's Data Services Line (DSL) or your residential cable TV service. If you're thinking along these lines then you might want to ask your accountant how the tax man will view the cable TV high speed Internet service costs or the home telephone DSL costs when you try to claim either as an expense. Your VOIP service might easily be claimable but if your high speed is over a service that is primarily for non-business use then you might not be able to claim the expense. Talk to your accountant, crunch the numbers.

IT BEHAVES LIKE A REGULAR PHONE

Well, OK, almost. VOIP providers do not yet have 911 capability, but they give you a consolation prize. Take your VOIP telephone and plug it into almost any high speed connection to the Internet and you will get a dial tone! This means that you can take your business phone with you to that convention in Las Vegas, plug it into the hotel's high speed Internet connection, and in all likelihood it will work as it should! Check with your VOIP provider to see if the preceding scenario would work for you. If so then you can make local calls to Barrie from Las Vegas and stay in touch with your customers while attending seminars or conferences. Oh, about 911. The reason it does not work is because this roaming capability means you could be anywhere on Earth. The Internet Protocol (IP) address of the hotel might narrow your location down to a chunk of Las Vegas, but that's a big haystack in which to search for a needle that might require immediate help. So 911, at this time, does not work over VOIP. Expect that to change in the future as the major telephone companies realize that this kind of service drastically reduces their cost of service delivery.

MSN Messenger SPAM Zombie danger

By Stephen Bungay

MSN Messenger is the latest delivery vehicle for a worm called "Bropia-F" which is turning infected Windows PCs into zombie drones ready to spew unwanted emails (commonly called SPAM) into the inboxes of everyone on the infected PC's address book. The worm offers "sexy image files" to the Messenger contacts of infected users and if they take the bait they get a photo of a roasted chicken with a bikini tan line on it. Meanwhile, in the background, the Bropia-F worm is busy installing a variant of another worm called "Agobot", which then opens a back door on the infected system. The bot (slang for robot) can then be used to collect system information, log keystrokes and relay SPAM, and you know how much you look forward to getting SPAM emails.

"Many corporations have been blocking the use of instant messenger programs for employee productivity reasons, and now may have good cause to do so for security reasons as well," said Joe Hartmann, senior virus researcher at anti-virus firm Trend Micro. "With the popularity of instant messenger, it may be the home users who are most at risk - this kind of worm uses humor to make people forget that they are being infected and back doors are being opened into their systems."

The Bropia-F worm comes in a file thats 184 KB in size, and it attempts to propagate to MSN Messenger users by sending a copy of itself under one of the file names in List-1;

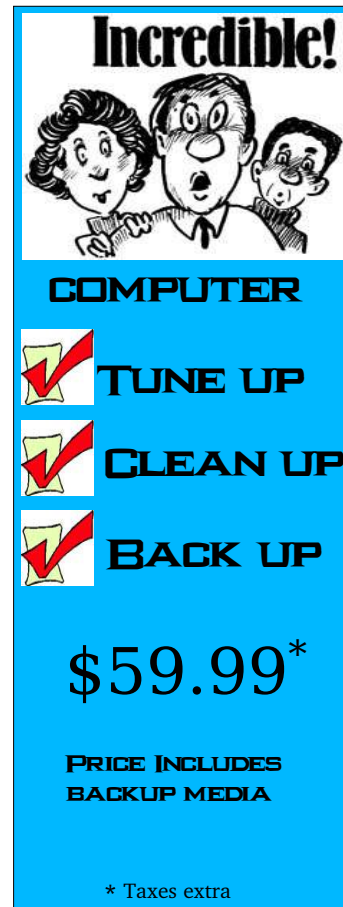
bedroom-thongs.pif
hot.pif
lmao.pif
lol.scr
naked_drunk.pif
new_webcam.pif
rofl.pif
underware.pif
webcam.pif.

List-1

The worm is rated as a medium risk.




Practice safe computing and exercise caution in the programs that are allowed to self-install on your PC. Windows users should ensure their antivirus signature files are up to date to detect the worm.

Smarts On Site



Incredible!

COMPUTER

-  **TUNE UP**
-  **CLEAN UP**
-  **BACK UP**

\$59.99*

**PRICE INCLUDES
BACKUP MEDIA**

* Taxes extra

If you must use Internet Explorer do this first

By Stephen Bungay

I have in the past advised many people that they move away from Internet Explorer (IE) and use a web browser that is safer, but if you just HAVE to use IE what can you do to protect your PC from being exploited by all the nifty "features" that are built into it?

First you have to turn off some of those features, at least as far as the Internet "zone" is concerned anyway. To do this;

1. Select the tools menu at the top of the Internet Explorer window and its "Internet options" sub-menu.
2. Select the tab labeled "security" on the resulting window.
3. Click on the icon labeled "Internet"
 - 3.1 Click on the button labeled "Custom Level".

A window will appear listing all of the features that are enabled and disabled for the Internet zone. Scroll down through this list looking for an item labeled "Active X controls and Plugins". For ultimate security set all of these to "disabled", but if you think you might want a web site to download programs and have them run inside your IE browser then set them to "prompt", this way IE will prompt you before it runs an Active X program from a web-site, if you think the program shouldn't run then you can deny it access.

Backing up your computer's hard disc...

Windows XP Home and Professional editions both have backup utilities built into them, as does Linux and Macintosh OS/X. Taking the time to back up your files can save you loads of stress later on when (not if) you get nailed by a virus, somebody drops your laptop, or your hard drive decides it's time is up and so is the data you have stored on it. In this article we are going to touch on the built in services of Linux and Windows XP, sorry, but the Mac users will have to consult their documentation, but the Mac is based on FreeBSD (a variation of Unix) and it most likely comes with it's own backup utility. OK, onward with the details...

Windows XP Home

By default Win XP Home doesn't have the backup utility installed on a new PC (thoughtful of them huh?) , so you'll have to do it yourself. Here's how...

1. Insert your Windows XP CD into the drive. If it doesn't auto-start then
 - 1a - Open "My Computer"
 - 1b Right click on the CD ICON to bring up the context menu.
 - 1c. Select the "Explore" item in the context menu. This will bring up Windows Explorer so you can view the contents of the CD.
4. In Windows Explorer, double-click the ValueAdd folder to open it. This will show you more folders.
 - 4a Find and double click on the Msft folder, then
 - 4b Find and double click on the Ntbackup folder
5. (Almost done) Locate and double-click on the file called "Ntbackup.msi" to begin the installation of the Backup utility.
6. You now have the backup utility installed. It's real name is ntbackup.exe. Proceed to the Windows XP Pro section to find out how to start it up.

If you get stuck, or if you just want to know more detail, Microsoft has a web-page on this subject at;
<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;q302894>

Windows XP Pro

Windows XP Pro users have life a little easier because the backup utility should have been installed at the same time that XP Pro was put on the machine.

1. Click the Start button on the menu bar
2. Select "All Programs"
3. Select "Accessories"
4. Select "System Tools"
5. Click "Backup" to start the wizard.

Linux (almost every flavour)

Linux users can select from a wide range of backup options. My personal favourite is "PartImage", which is short for "Partition Image" and it allows the user to create a snapshot of their computer's hard disc(s). These "images" can be broken up into smaller files to allow for easy storage on CD ROMs or DVDs. Partition Image can also be used to backup Windows computers. See your Distributions documentation or installation packages for all of the options available to you. Here are just a few third party backup utilities along with their Internet home pages. Out of all of these only Storix is a commercial product, the others are free

Kdar: <http://kdar.sourceforge.net>

dar: <http://dar.linux.free.fr/>

Storix: <http://www.storix.com>

Bacula: <http://www.bacula.org>

rdiff-backup: <http://www.nongnu.org/rdiff-backup>

Smarts On Site

This Smart Sheet newsletter is © 2005 by Stephen A. Bungay

Permission is hereby granted by the author to copy and distribute this document, under the following conditions. 1. No modification may be made to its content. 2. No Front-Cover Texts may obscure the original cover page. 3. No Back-Cover Texts may be appended, 4. This copyright notice and permission notice are included and legible.

All trademarked items belong to their respective owners