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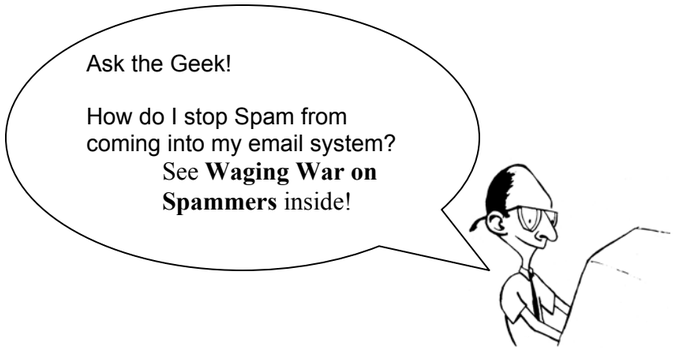

UPLOAD

Prince William County - Greater Manassas Chamber of Commerce
Issue 1 September 2003

The Quarterly Newsletter on Technology Issues by Chamber Members

Welcome to the Newsletter of the Technology Committee of the Chamber. We face issues everyday and wonder if someone else has seen this and what they have done about it. In this newsletter we wish to share answers to many of the questions faced by other Chamber members. Please feel free to contact the authors with your follow-up questions or other ideas. Articles, Tips and Trips are welcome. Submit them to **Upload** Through **aduecaster @pwcgmcc.org**

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UPLOAD

Wireless Networking

By Andy Harrover of The Matrix Group
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Wireless networking (wifi for short) is all the rage and for good reason: convenience. The allure of just picking up a laptop and walking into a conference room while still connected to the network is too great to ignore. Even McDonalds is doing a pilot test to provide wireless access to its' customers. There are no wires to pull and no holes to punch. In addition, wireless networks can be added to extend the reach of existing wired networks. Wireless networks are also reasonably fast. You generally would not want to watch multiple video streams on a wireless connection but it is plenty fast for web surfing, printing and email. Wireless products have matured to the point where you really do not have to be an expert to install them (but it does help). All you need to get going is a Wireless Access Point (WAP) and some wireless network cards. However, when setting up a wireless network for your business there are a few things to consider when getting started:

What particular flavor of wireless networking are you going to use? So far there are 3 standards: 802.11A, B and G. By far, the most commonly used technology is the "B" flavor. To save you from a confusing mix of specifications, the comparison can be boiled down like this: "A" is faster but "B" has better range. The emerging "G" flavor will have both great speed and range. The most common equipment that you will encounter will be the "B" standard and it is generally good enough. The emerging "G" standard claims to interoperate with the older "B" standard equipment but that remains to be seen.

The second consideration is the layout of the computers on your network. While most of the wireless devices out there claim indoor ranges of 100', you may often get much less. Anything between the WAP and your computer can degrade the signal. This is especially true in older buildings as plaster construction degrades the wireless signal quickly. In addition, cordless phones and microwave ovens can cause problems for wireless networks. Try to locate your Wireless Access Point in a central location away from any possible sources of interference.
Remember that the more "stuff" between you and the WAP, the weaker the signal will be and the slower the network.

The third and most important consideration is security. Wireless networks use low-power radios to communicate. The signal is broadcast in all directions and may be received by anyone within range of the WAP. Steps must be taken to secure your wireless network. Even if you do not care at all about your data, you probably do not want someone using your internet connection attack other computers or to download illegal content. The first step is purely preventative: put your WAP in the middle of your building to minimize the amount of signal available outside of your facility. The second step is to encrypt (or "scramble") your network communications. All of these wireless devices have the capability to encrypt their communications. Setting it up is reasonably easy and most products come with directions. These two steps will provide a reasonable level of security. Neither is perfect. If your data is of a sensitive nature (financial, medical, legal) or you simply want to keep others out, a more sophisticated solution is necessary.

This short list is by no means complete but it is a good starting point.

Address these three things and you will be on your way towards a successful wireless network.

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Waging War on Spammers

by Larry Maguire of VASI
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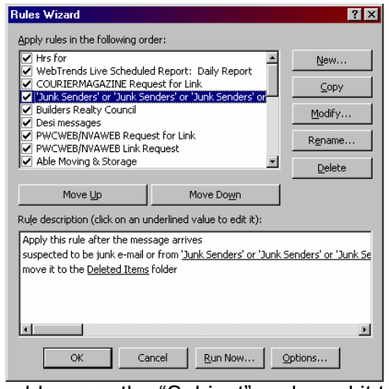
Nothing can be more frustrating than unsolicited telemarketers wasting your time opening your email each day only to find over 75% of your email is unsolicited email relating to products that you are not even vaguely interested in.

Once of the best ways I have found to fight the email marketers is with the use of Microsoft's Outlook email software and the **Rules Wizard**.

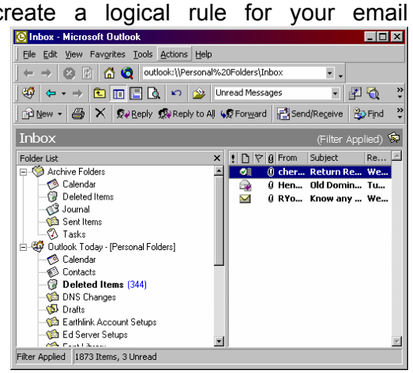


This software program allows you to set up basic rules to manage incoming email. For instance, you can set up a rule using words in the "From" address or the "Subject" and send it to specific, pre-defined folders in you **Outbox**.

GET STARTED - USING THE RULES WIZARD

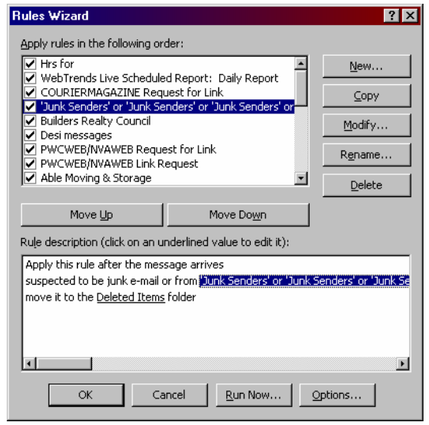
Here's an example. Using this Rules Wizard,

Select **New**. This will start the sequence of steps to follow to create a logical rule for your email program to apply to all incoming email. I use "Junk Senders" to send all of my email to my **Delete** folder.



MANAGING SPAM

Outlook provides you with a way to add the new email addresses of spammers to that rule.

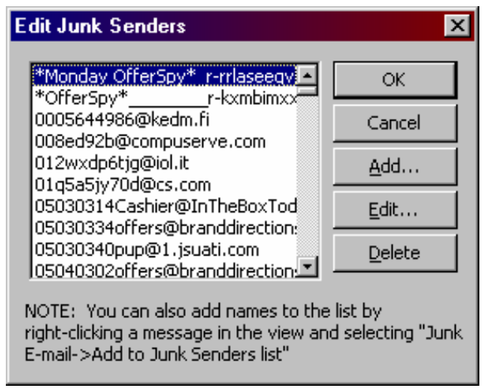


First highlight the email in the Inbox. Then, on the Toolbar, under Actions, you can select Junk E-mail > Add to Junk Sender List. This will copy the email address to the rule and any further email from this sender will have the rule applied to their email.

You can also delete email addresses in the rule by going to the Rules Wizard and opening the rule.

Then click, in this case, "Junk Senders" link. This will open the list of email addresses that are currently in the rule.

There are so many spammers sending useless email that this will help manage only the repetitive emailers and, hopefully, help you make your time at work more effective and useful.



Send questions that you would like to have answered in the ASK THE GEEK section to:
aduecaster@pwcgmcc.org

Compare Apples to Apples

By Dan Vetal of LaserAge
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Controlling costs and budgeting for unexpected office equipment needs can be an Office Manager or Information System Manager's dilemma. When you least expect it – and when your #1 client has requested the report by COB – the "low toner" message or "Service Error 49.9" message will put the brakes on your busy office's printing or copying.

To minimize the stress of these occasions, put in place now, a relationship with a service or supplies vendor who you know will be there when you need help.

Choosing a Quality Vendor

How do you choose a quality vendor? First, seek an Authorized Service Provider. ASPs will have required training, testing, and access to critical parts. Otherwise, you'll be disappointed when the technician shows up but leaves with the equipment still down because he has to research the machine or has to "track down a part."

When researching ASPs, ask: What is your average response time? Are you HP/Lexmark/Canon authorized? Do you provide on-site service? Do you keep parts in stock? Do technicians carry parts?

And most important: Can I talk to a technician? Often an experienced technician will provide a quick solution for your machine's problem right over the phone. If not, at the least he'll be able to provide a quality estimate of repair costs.

Service Agreements

Of course, the best way to control unexpected service costs and equipment down-time is to purchase service agreements. But beware, not all service agreements are the same! When shopping, be sure to compare agreements and understand what is included.

Many printer manufacturers are now offering cost-per-page agreements in which the customer pays for all supplies, repair labor, and parts for a set annual price. These usually have page or "click" limitations.

For fixed budgets, look into all-inclusive one-price agreement that includes all parts, labor, preventive maintenance, and loaner machines for a set annual fee. But even in these situations, be sure to read the agreement carefully. Many service agreements do not include key and expensive parts such as drum or fusing units.

Make sure the service agreement you're considering has an "out", so if the service provider fails to provide

quality and timely service, you as the customer can cancel and receive a refund.

Finally, make sure to request and check referrals. Happy, long-term clients are the best sign of an honest, high-quality, and reliable service provider.

Pricing

Time and materials prices will vary, depending on what is included. Some companies charge a low hourly service rate, but mark parts prices up by 300% or tack on travel fees. Ask to speak to a technician, who can provide realistic quotes.

And if the price seems high, remember, experience is everything. A highly qualified technician will bring the necessary parts with him, complete the job in one hour, and have it done right the first time so your office can get back to satisfying your clients.

In the end …

To summarize: ask questions, compare, and be ready for the day your equipment goes down. Search now for a service vendor, and keep their number handy, taped onto the side of the machine. When crunch time comes, you'll be glad you did the leg-work thoroughly and ahead of time.