IT Corner – November 2003

"If All Else Fails"…

After the last column in July a couple of volunteers brought their computers to me to see if I could fix them (resulting in several, much appreciated, free meals). As someone who likes to fix things I guess I always like to see if I can so I tend to overlook the "final solution"....After several hours working on these computers I was getting no where. I realized then that the cause was hopeless. There was only one solution and that was, to "give up" and start all over again.

When you purchase a new computer the manufacturer/supplier SHOULD (assuming they are not "Joe's Fly-By-Night Bitiko and Computer Emporium") provide you with original installation CDs. It is from these CDs that you can, essentially, "rebuild" your operating system and software. When all attempts to fix your computer fails this may be your ONLY alternative. CAREFULLY read then follow the directions on the CD itself (or in the manual) to re-install. If you are using the CDs for specific computer software (such as Microsoft Windows or Microsoft Office) then the installation program will NORMALLY keep all of your settings and files -- They will NOT be erased. If you are using a "Product Recovery CD" (typically on a laptop), this may not be the case…

For a laptop, manufacturers in recent years have been shipping a "Product Recovery CD" which will essentially initialize your laptop to the way it was when you first purchased it -- Completely erasing all information from the hard disk and re-installing all the software. So, all of those Word Documents you have created and all the time you spent making the computer behave the way you wanted to will all be gone. So, needless to say, it is important before using this software that you back-up (perhaps to floppy disk) as much of the information on the hard disk that you cannot re-install from the software CDs you have available (such as Word Documents, Excel Spreadsheets, etc). Using Product Recovery CDs is normally quite straightforward -- Simply follow the directions written on the CD itself or in your computer's manual (you kept that, didn't you?).

You should always remember that if you are NOT comfortable at doing something on your computer yourself you might be best off taking it to a repair service. Even if it ends up costing you some money it might be better for your piece of mind…
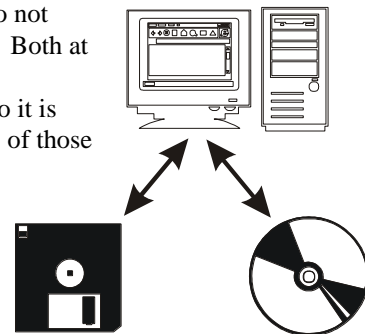
Here in The Gambia, for software and minor technical work, Quantum Associates is not that bad but if you want more technical work done I would suggest ITS though they tend to be more expensive -- You get what you pay for! If it the difference between having your computer working or not working, isn't it worth a few thousand dalasis? Do you know how much it costs to have computers repaired in the UK?

To Back-Up or not to Back-Up: There IS no Question

I have been surprised over the years to find the number of people that do not make regular back-ups of the information they have on their computers. Both at their place of work and at home. It is only a matter of time before your computer WILL fail or your document WILL be irrevocably damaged so it is important that you take a few minutes every month or so to make copies of those files that are "irreplaceable".

Here in The Gambia it is not really advisable to back-up your files to floppy disk since these have a life span of approximately two weeks after you have opened t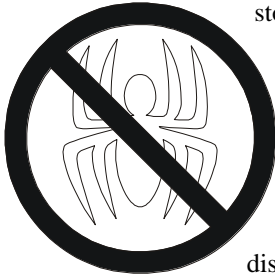he package (less if you actually USE the disk). It is ideal if you can "burn" your documents onto a CD (if you know of someone with one) or use some other more permanent "computer media" but you might not be able to do this. If you must use diskettes then try to make sure you have multiple diskette copies and that the diskettes

are kept in a dust-free environment (a sealed plastic bag kept in a cool dark place, like the back of a dresser drawer, is good).

Virus Scanning

One of the essential pieces of software I purchase before coming to The Gambia was an anti-virus program. I paid good money for it and it has saved my computer more than once. This software continuously runs quietly behind the scenes on your computer looking for any virus-like behavior which it will detect then stop. If you are using the Internet or regularly use floppy disks from other computers, anti-virus software is absolutely essential.

Anti-virus software is a good investment but you should remember that anti-virus software is only as good as how often it is updated with the latest virus information. You need to update the software as often as possible (once a week is normally fine) in order to keep up with the new viruses that seem to be introduced almost daily into the world. Most of the time these updates are distributed over the Internet so you will need Internet access to do this.

Most anti-virus software operates on a "subscription" basis where you purchase the software and get a year of updates free. At the end of that year you must renew your subscription. If you don't renew you run the risk of being exposed to any new viruses.

News

- Alliance Franco-Gambienne has once again started their Monday night movies (at 8:30 pm, normally in their outdoor amphitheatre at the back). They do not normally check memberships but you are, theoretically, supposed to have one to get in to the movie (the yearly membership for "movie only" is 250D).
- The "Volunteers in Gambia" web site now has an updated list of volunteer DVDs that can be searched for that movie you have always wanted to see…
- There is currently a draft of the "ICT Cadre" available for anyone who is interested which discusses the various ICT jobs within the civil service here in The Gambia and the promotion mechanism. Let me know if you are interested in either participating in the drafting of this cadre or would like to see a draft.
- Local computer vendors seem to be getting the message about providing legal versions of software -- At least to our experience within health. They seem to realize that in order to protect our investment we want the software in the worse case we have to re-install (see above). **Remember:** If you demand legal software and original software CDs the supplier will HAVE to provide it…
- The "VSO: The Gambia" web site will once again be looked at early in the new year when VSO (UK) says that their new web site software will be in place. If you have any information you feel might be useful, please contact either David (Clamp) or myself. We will, no doubt, be approaching several volunteers anyway for their contributions….
- As normal the "Steve Rice Computer Fix-It Service" operates at the cost of one meal per problem fixed (cost negotiable)

As per normal, let me know if there bare any topics you would like me to discuss/address in this column.

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