

RANDOM

William Blinn
COMMUNICATIONS

179 Caren Avenue
Worthington, Ohio 43085
614-785-9359
Fax 877-870-4892
www.Blinn.com

January 2007

COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

Information Technology feels the insecurity

Eweek magazine, shortly before the end of 2006, ran an article called “10 Gifts IT Doesn’t Want to See on the Network.” It reminded me to be happy that I’m not involved in IT security because the security folks are clearly at the mercy of anyone who wants access to the company’s data. Let’s take a look at a few of them.

Spies, both corporate and government, have made good use of cameras over the years. Today’s digital camera (including cameras in cell phones) allow people to take pictures of sensitive information or documents and carry them out. Or download them, compress or encrypt them, and send them out via e-mail. Or, if they’re concerned about an e-mail trail, upload them to an FTP server or a service such as YouSendIt. Or, if the camera is in a phone, use the phone to send the image.

Scanner pens look a lot like highlighters; instead of laying down marks, they pick up words. Some of them have enough memory to store several large documents. The pen won’t look out of place in your pocket or briefcase and will probably sail right past most security posts.

USB thumb drives are security nightmares. They’re smaller than a pack of gum and can hold as much as 4GB of data. Most computers have USB ports these days. That’s good for people who use the devices to take files home to work on them at night but they’re also one of the easiest ways to walk out with computer programs, customer lists, development plans, and other valuable information.

An Ipod with an 80GB disk fits in your shirt pocket, looks innocent, and can hold either 80GB of music or 80GB of information from your corporate server. **B**



The Internet to the Rescue

The Internet is a bit like air. Sometimes we barely notice that it’s there, but we surely miss when it’s not available – even for just a few hours. When used carefully, the Internet can be a valuable research tool even though much of what is there is unedited and unvetted. Every conspiracy nut on the planet seems to have a website that promotes one little delusion or another, so caution is required. Where the Internet really shines, though, is in its ability to quickly solve technical problems.

Recently when I needed to scan a few drawings for younger daughter Kaydee, I tried to start the scanner application that came with my Epson Perfection 3200 Photo scanner. Crash.

I unplugged the USB cable and plugged it back in. Crash. I restarted the computer. Crash. I downloaded a new version of the driver and installed it. Crash. I restarted the computer again. Crash. The only new application on the computer since the last time the scanner worked was the Comodo firewall, so I turned it off. Crash. By then I’d wasted an hour.

Typing *Escndv.exe* has encountered a problem and needs to close into Google returned an item titled *Epson Scan won’t open with Epson Perfection 3200*. This is exactly the problem I was seeing and the page offered several suggestions.

Most of the answers were guesses and were either things I’d already tried or things that I had ruled out as being too illogical or too dangerous to try. But later in the thread, the person who asked the question said that he had solved it. As it turns out, a leftover thumbnail image from a previous scanning session was causing the application to crash.

Before finding the answer, I had sent a request to Epson’s support team. Two weeks later, I received an answer. The answer was wrong. The guy who answered his own question and mine is in Germany. **B**



Baby, it’s cold outside

You can probably ignore this item if you’re in the sunbelt; but if you live where there’s snow, read on. It’s easy to forget that that your Ipod or other music or game device has a hard drive in it. It’s also easy to forget that your car’s engine needs an occasional oil change. Forgetting about either of these is liable to produce results that will be distressing. If you have a car, change the oil regularly. If you have a device with a hard drive in it, pay attention to the usage specifications.

Game systems, personal computers, and MP3 music players all have built-in hard drives that require protection from the elements. Data recovery experts at DriveSavers warn that hard drives can be damaged when the temperature drops below freezing. “Many people don’t realize hard drives are precision devices and need to operate at specific temperatures”, says company president Scott Gaidano.

Extreme cold causes condensation on the platters inside a hard drive. "The moisture can destroy the drive," says Gaidano. The company recommends:

- Not storing electronic devices in car trunks – especially those devices that contain a hard drive.
- Allowing devices that have been stored where they are below freezing to defrost before being operated.
- Backing up all the files on your old computer before you start to transfer them to a new one.
- Using surge protectors or battery backup systems to protect electronic devices.

DriveSavers, established in 1985, has recovered data from hard drives and other storage media that have been damaged, dropped, burnt, crushed, and drowned. The service isn't inexpensive, but DriveSavers has an excellent success rate and can recover data in as little as 24 hours from all operating systems and storage media including hard drives, disk arrays, floppies, CD-ROM, DVD, removable cartridges, digital camera media, and backup tapes.

I hope you'll never need DriveSavers; if you do, the company is factory-authorized by hard drive manufacturers to open sealed-drive mechanisms without voiding the original warranty. They're at www.DriveSavers.com. **B**

Record labels are dead

They just don't know it yet. Independent artists and small labels are using the Internet to go around the big labels that used to control music. The RIAA continues to fight, but the cause is already lost. Groups such as Chumbawamba openly thumb their collective noses at the old system and new artists such as Vienna Teng (a former Cisco Systems programmer) use the Web to spread the word about her CDs.

Vienna Teng is possibly the best example of the new paradigm. She appeared on the Bob Edwards program on XM Radio late in 2006 to talk about her new CD, *Dreaming Through The Noise*. It's her 3rd CD. In the interview with Edwards, Teng talked about using a Web-based service that allows her fans to vote on where she should schedule performances. Her website is well designed and, although she told Edwards she doesn't do the design herself, she does occasionally tinker with it.

Speaking of radio, I time-shift the Bob Edwards Show. At 8am, I'm at work and cannot concentrate on listening to Bob's guests, but my XM radio is one that can record the program. I play it at 4pm when I'm exercising. This is similar to the technology that allows people to hear my Technology Corner podcast at their convenience. Maybe terrestrial radio is dead, too. I consider that a tragedy, and I hold organizations such as Clear Channel responsible for the demise.

I'm delighted that NPR kicked Edwards off *Morning Edition* because that gave him the opportunity to create a new kind of program on XM. *The Bob Edwards Show* is far different from *Morning Edition* in that Bob can take some, most, or all of the hour to talk with a single guest. His eclectic music tastes are delightful. The only thing that concerns me about XM Radio is that Clear Channel owns part of it. But that's probably another story for another time.

Vienna Teng's scrapbook

After listening to Edwards' interview with Teng, I visited her website. One of the main attractions is the "scrapbook" section. Others would call it a "blog". It's here that Teng talks about what she's doing and where she's been. She shows photographs (one photo shows her with a plate full of food and is tagged "a proper Southern breakfast New Orleans LA".) This is a way of connecting with her audience. It's sincere and personable, which is something the big labels and the RIAA wouldn't understand.

The artist communicates directly and intimately with the people who are likely to come to her concerts and to buy her records. Some of the more radical musicians feel that their recordings should be freely (as in "no cost") available as an advertisement for their live performances. This makes sense to me because sometimes the best way to get people to pay for what you do is to give something away.

Teng's website offers several downloadable MP3 files. If you want the entire CD, you can buy it, but there's also a "merchandise" section on the website with clothing, sheet music, and more. These are the kinds of things that the RIAA and the big labels don't understand but are immediately obvious to 20-something artists such as Vienna Teng.

My favorite Irish Russian artist

Other artists such as Katie Melua, an enormously talented young lady who's Russian by birth and Irish because that's where her father moved to pursue a career in surgery, also promote themselves on the Web. Fans in Poland ("Don't forget Poland!") tell her story, too. Melua is on Artist Direct and several other sites. *Eto ochin khorosho!* (In Russian or passably in Polish, "This is very good!")

If you're an oldie (as I am), just imagine what the Beatles would have done with this kind of technology. I for one will not miss the record labels and their underhanded deals to get air time on the nation's radio stations. Artists such as Vienna Teng will do well because they understand the new media.

In December, Maria Muldaur was a guest on the Bob Edwards show. I've always liked Muldaur's music. Back in the 1970s, I was the news director at "Radio Free Wheeling", WOMP outside greater metropolitan Bellaire, Ohio, on a hill overlooking Wheeling, West Virginia. The news staff had to fill in every few weeks on Saturdays as disk jockeys. I think most of the other news folk thought this was beneath their dignity, but I enjoyed it.

About that time Muldaur released *Midnight at the Oasis* and I liked it. I remember receiving a complaint call from a listener who felt that playing *Midnight at the Oasis* twice in a 4-hour program was too much. Maybe it was and I'm don't recall what I told the listener, but I'm sure it wasn't polite. **B**

on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

*"You are responsible
for everything
your people do
or fail to do."*