

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

In this issue

Annual General Meeting

Your presence is requested 1

Renewal notice

Fees are now due 1

Next meeting

The best laid plans of mice and men 2

Newsletter developments

HTML to reappear? 2

Spam and virus flood

Internode receives a spam and virus onslaught 2

Mandriva acquires Lycoris' assets

Plans to use its acquisition in Mandriva Discovery 3

An assurance from eBay

Apply this principle more widely 3

FTTP

One more form of broadband 3

Annual General Meeting

The formal notice for the AGM will be published in the "Mercury" in compliance with the Rules of the Association. However, you are reminded that the Annual General Meeting of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. will take place at the G. A. Wood Hall, 29 Bathurst Street, Hobart at 8.00 pm on 9 August 2005. All members are asked to attend to elect a Management Committee for the coming year, to set the membership fee, and to consider the Annual Reports from the President and Treasurer.

[Index](#)

Renewal notice

For almost all members, 30 June 2005 marks the end of their membership year. Thus, unless there are special circumstances, such as having paid a full year's subscription a few months ago, your membership fee is now due. As decided at last year's AGM, the current membership fee is \$30, \$5 of which is being put into a fund to finance new equipment and repairs to existing equipment. This will ensure that we are able to upgrade or repair our computer, monitor, projector and other equipment as needed. You can download a Renewal/Application form from our website:

<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>

[Index](#)

Next Meeting

We had scheduled Don Trotman to talk on Picasa 2 photo handling software and Peter Campbell to talk on AVG antivirus software. Unfortunately, Don had overlooked a very important occasion – his wife's 80th birthday – and will be unable to make it. Your 'umble editor has agreed to step into the breach and talk about Picasa 2 as well as AVG.

These two applications are excellent examples of “free for non-commercial, personal use” programs and are widely used by our members. Peter will explain how best to put them to use, with particular emphasis on Picasa 2, Google's free photo cataloguing and retouching program. He will also look at finding, installing, updating and configuring Grisoft's AVG antivirus program. You can obtain these two applications from:

<http://www.picasa.com>
and <http://www.grisoft.com/doc/40/lng/us/tpl/tpl01> respectively.

(If you are looking for AVG and don't have the above link handy, go to <http://www.grisoft.com> and then click on Products. Look through the drop-down menu for AVG Free Edition and click on the link.)

Peter will also bring along a few gadgets that you may not have seen, including a cordless mouse that doesn't use batteries, a USB lamp, a hard drive fan and a USB battery charger. He's also solved the problem of the speaker having his back to the audience. Be at the G. A. Wood Hall, 29 Bathurst Street, Hobart at 8.00 pm on Tuesday, 12 July 2005 to see it all.

[Index](#)

Newsletter developments

My appeal for someone to email an HTML version of this newsletter to those who would prefer it in that format has been tentatively answered. Bob Curran is going to take a look at what's involved and it may therefore be possible to resume emailing the newsletter in that format shortly. The plan is for him to experiment with this issue's text and learn how to email it and for the next issue to be emailed if no insoluble problems crop up.

[Index](#)

Spam and virus flood

Internode recently reported that, instead of the usual 1.2 million daily emails, it received a flood of spam and virus-infected emails that peaked around 60 million a day. Here's what happened and what they did about it:

[T]he Internode customer mail server cluster suffered serious performance issues and mail delays in the period from June 28th to July 1st 2005. Our mail service normally delivers around 1.2 million messages a day. During this period, the incoming spam and virus traffic volume dramatically exceeded normal levels, peaking at an incoming message rate more than 50 times the usual level.

The mail cluster did continue to deliver customer email, notwithstanding that delivery was substantially delayed for many customers. The delays were the consequence of the system processing, and rejecting, this onslaught of additional incoming message traffic. As another consequence of the exceptionally high message load, some customer email messages were delivered multiple times - the system does this in order to insure against non-delivery of the messages concerned.

We take any sort of disruption to our service very seriously. We have had teams of people working solidly to fix this problem, around the clock, since it began. We made a decision to guarantee that email got through eventually – even if it took some time to work through the backlog – rather than just clear the queues and start from scratch, which would have caused even more problems for our customers.

During this incident, we configured and installed additional network hardware to permanently block the incoming spam onslaught, by creating a second tier of high performance email firewalling for our mail cluster. This new system is capable of rejecting incoming spam and virus attacks of this sort on a sustained basis, and operates in addition to the anti-spam/anti-virus software already operational inside the mail cluster itself.

In a round-the-clock effort, a separate technical team worked to improve the efficiency of the underlying cluster, installing additional mail processing cluster service nodes and installing higher performance disk server systems. These efforts allowed the server to clear the backlog still faster, and will also provide sustained benefits in terms of future server performance. We apologise to every customer who was disrupted by these email problems.

As you can see, spam costs – everybody. It means that Internet Service Providers have to set up additional (expensive)

systems, it adds to your download quota and time, which costs you money if you exceed your quota or are on a timed connection, and having to deal with the spam that does get through means that employees are less productive. That loss of productivity feeds into the cost of goods and services.

If you recently experienced email delays, didn't receive expected emails, or received multiple copies of an email, blame the spammers and virus writers. Internode was not the only provider affected. Take spam seriously. Never buy from spammers and adopt protective measures to prevent your email address being spammed.

[Index](#)

Mandriva acquires Lycoris

Linspire (formerly Lindows), Xandros and Lycoris (initially Redmond Linux) all offered similar Linux distributions based on Debian and a modified KDE desktop. Each implemented an online system for downloading and installing additional applications, for which they charged a subscription or membership fee.

Linspire, as a result of its legal tussle with Microsoft, probably had the highest profile. Xandros acquired the work that Corel had done on their award-winning Linux and built a solid product on that base. Lycoris was the least known and, when I checked prices, seemed to be the dearest. Over time Lycoris' insistence on using proven technology, rather than bleeding edge, left them with a product that lagged behind in a number of areas, especially hardware detection.

Now Lycoris' assets have been acquired by Mandriva (formerly Mandrake, until forced to change its name by the Mandrake comic's proprietor), a move initiated by Lycoris. The founder, Joseph Cheek, is now working for Mandriva and will "be working on integrating the best features of Lycoris into Mandriva Linux, especially into the Discovery product aimed at new Linux users." Once he has had time to do that, Mandriva Discovery may be worth a look. We'll keep you posted.

[Index](#)

An assurance from eBay

In a recent email from eBay.com.au I noticed the following footer:

eBay will never ask for your sensitive information including financial details or passwords in an email. Always go directly to eBay.com.au and log into your account from there. To learn more on how to protect yourself from spoof (fake) emails go to <http://pages.ebay.com.au/education/spoofutorial>.

The principles involved, namely that financial details are not requested (or given) in an email and of always going directly to the organisation's website to access your account, should be applied to all your online transactions. The tutorial offered is well worth reading, even if you don't have an eBay account. Some of the spoofs doing the rounds are very subtle and the tutorial will teach you how to spot them.

[Index](#)

FTTP

At my talk on broadband, someone (I think it was Derek) asked "What's all this talk about fibre?". At the time I couldn't think what he was alluding to but have since come across some information on *Fibre To The Premises (FTTP)*. This piece from PC Magazine gives more details:

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,1828112,00.asp>

[Index](#)

©Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. (except where stated otherwise) Last changed: 10 July 2005
Editor: Peter Campbell, C/-Hobart Computer Users Group Inc., PO Box 563, Rosny Park Tas 7018, Australia.
Phone: (03) 6234 4691 Email: editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au.

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed herein are those of the Editor or the author of the item concerned and are not necessarily endorsed by the Management Committee of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. While care is taken in compiling the information in this newsletter, the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. and its officers and members cannot take responsibility for any problems arising from the use of the information.

Website: Back issues are available from our website <http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>.
Subscriptions: To subscribe to this newsletter, please visit our website. It is available in PDF format.