

Doctors Orders

Hello and welcome to the July edition of Doctors Orders.

June was a hectic month for me, I have my Microsoft exams coming up soon and I've been trying to get all that accumulated knowledge that floats around in my head like cotton wool, onto paper so that I can get a certificate to convince our customers that I am competent to be let loose on their PC's.

One of our engineers told me that if I pass I have to salute the Microsoft flag and pledge allegiance to Bill Gates and the CIA.

Another said they make you eat Google biscuits until you are sick. I am not sure I fancy either of those, even if I knew what a Google biscuit was. Maybe I'll take the Cisco exams instead.

In the middle of all that, the boss told me to check over our competition PC package to make sure that is was perfect for our prize winner.

I solemnly swear that the prize winning PC package is the tops, the whole tops and nothing but the tops. You can see details of the lucky winner on page 9.

It comes with a month's free trial of our remote access support, so if the winner has any problems, they can just ring us and we will take over the PC remotely and fix it. The wonders of modern science!

Apparently, the PC competition was so popular, the boss has decided to give away a printer next month.

This strange behaviour hasn't gone unnoticed.

Some say, he saw an apparition of a fat Elvis Presley telling him to give away all his money.

Some say, the sight of the bailiffs repossessing his yacht from Monty Carlo's marina has finally tipped him over the edge.

All we know is, he's paid back the £1,000 expenses claimed for de-fluffing his home PC and he pays my wages, so that makes him a good guy in my book.

Craig the trainee.



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The Best Free Security List in the World ?

Antti Koponen, has personally compiled a huge list of free security software which he has modestly titled "Probably the Best Free Security List in the World"

Whether it is the "best" I cannot say but it is extraordinarily comprehensive and includes many products I didn't even know existed.

Please note that this is just a list not a set of recommendations. However for anyone who has an interest in security it is a fabulous resource.

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/probably-best-free-security-list-world.htm>

Free Standing Weather Gadget For Your Desktop

Desktop gadgets usually need programs of one sort or another to run. There are Google gadgets, Yahoo gadgets, Vista Sidebar gadgets.....you get the idea.

This weather gadget installs all on its own. It has two display modes; one is small with text and a weather icon indicating the conditions. For a larger view and forecast, click on 'more' and the screen expands showing a 4 day forecast appears.

Mousing over the images brings up the forecast. Clicking on the temperatures toggles between Fahrenheit and Celsius, and clicking on the location allows you to change locales.

The weather gadget is mostly transparent so whatever is on your desktop background will show through.



Head on over to get your own weather gadget. While you're there, take a look at the other gadgets, wallpapers, and other artwork created by the very talented site owner. If you enjoy wallpapers or winter holidays, have a look at the holidays section for lots of goodies.

http://www.adni18.com/gallery/details.php?image_id=327



Don't forget, if you are into weather gadgets but want something a little more discrete , we have a weather gadget included in our browser toolbar. It also includes links into the most important pages on our website, including free software. You can add a variety of gadgets to the toolbar to suite your needs, it just sits at the top of your browser (Internet Explorer or Firefox) until you need it. Versions for IE, Firefox & Safari.

<http://computerdoctors.ourtoolbar.com/>

Gobbledegook error messages

Ask the Doctor

A customer encountered one of Windows' least-clear and most-useless error messages:

"A new problem has crept into my Windows XP Home machine. I can't add files to a CD-R anymore. If I try to add a file while the disk is spinning, I get the Blue Screen of Death that states I have a 'bad pool header' (whatever that means).

"And when I'm in a Windows utility like Explorer or Power Desk 6, if I highlight a file and hit Delete, the program fails. This also happens if I'm in Word or Excel and try to delete a file from the Open dialog box".

"These problems all seem related, and while I can't verify it, they seem to have appeared after I upgraded to Office 2003. Do you have any ideas as to where I can look?"

Congratulations. You've discovered what may very well be Microsoft's most-poorly explained error message.

Even digging into this error message's numeric content won't help much. For example — and I'm not making this up — if "parameter 3" is 0x3, then the error message is telling you "the read-back flink freelist value" is indicating that "the pool freelist is corrupt."

Wow, my flink indicates corruption! Thanks, Microsoft — that clears up everything!

Because this kind of developer-level problem is far, far removed from anything most end users can actually solve, and probably most repairers as well, the only option is to try to undo whatever triggered the problem. For example, you say you recently upgraded to MS Office 2003. I suggest you uninstall Office and run a Registry cleaner to make sure all vestiges of the Office setup are gone. (Ccleaner is available from our download page).

Reboot and reinstall Office, making sure the Office setup program is the only software running. With luck, the program will install cleanly this time.

Sometimes, a bad pool header error is associated with a hardware change. If that's the case, uninstall whatever drivers and other software came with the hardware, disconnect the hardware, and reboot. Let the system boot fully without the suspect hardware active. Then reboot again and reinstall the hardware using the most recent known-good versions of its drivers and other software.

If the problem persists, the hardware itself may be at fault.

Removing and reinstalling whatever triggered the bad pool header error will often fix things. But sometimes you sim-

ply don't know what the trigger was. When this happens, the best course of action may be to do a Repair install of Windows.

If none of these solutions works, I'm sorry to say your only recourse may be to reinstall Windows. The upside to a Windows reinstallation is that most people will never, ever see a bad pool header error message. Those who do will almost always solve their problem by following the steps mentioned. But for the unluckiest of the unlucky a full reinstall may be required.

External-drive format dilemma stops backups

Ask the Doctor

Something's preventing a customer from being able to save his disk-image backup files:

"I create regular disk images of my C: partition. I recently bought a 1TB USB drive, primarily to back up my photos, but I also want to keep copies of my drive images on it. I can copy photos and other files to the USB drive without any problems, but when I try to copy a drive image I get an error message saying there's no room on the drive (or the drive is full, I forget the actual wording). This is nonsense.

"In the course of investigating this mystery, I tried to copy the image file (which is about 5.5GB) to an 8GB USB memory stick, and exactly the same message came up. Why?"

Many external USB storage devices end up formatted as FAT32, which has a 4GB file-size limit. This is the mathematical limit of a 32-bit address space; you simply can't save any files larger than 4GB to a standard FAT32 device. (For more info, see TechNet article 938937.)

<http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/cc938937.aspx>

The solution is to convert the device to NTFS, which can handle file sizes up to 2TB. The Windows utility **convert.exe** can usually switch FAT32 and FAT16 disks to NTFS without your having to take everything off the disk first, although it's always smart to make a full backup beforehand.

Microsoft Knowledge Base article 307881 shows you how to use **convert.exe** in XP.

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/307881/en-us>

A similar article on the Windows Help and How-to site walks you through the same process for Vista.

<http://windowshelp.microsoft.com/Windows/en-US/Help/414a3808-283a-4e4d-b5ff-1a6d06f597d31033.msp>

Break from MS Office with free alternatives

If you're thinking of skipping the next expensive Microsoft Office upgrade, you can begin preparing today for the move to a free Office-like suite or Web service.



A gradual and easy transition allows you to avoid any possible file incompatibilities, because you can still keep an old copy of Office available as a safety net.

I like almost everything about Microsoft Office except its price. Even so, like many people, I use only a fraction of the suite's features. I rely mostly on the basic formatting, spell-check, grammar, and review features of Word, with an occasional Excel spreadsheet or PowerPoint slide thrown in for good measure. The rest of Office is bloatware to me.

I don't automate my documents with VBA macros; my Excel tables are rudimentary; and my PowerPoint presentations are just as simple. Do I really need to pay to load a copy of Office on every computer I use?

I stuck with the Microsoft behemoth all the way through Office 2003. To date, I've never felt a need for Office 2007. In recent years, meanwhile, upstart productivity applications have seduced me away from Microsoft's ubiquitous suite.

I started using the free, open-source OpenOffice.org suite on a daily basis several years ago to see whether it could really replace Office. Though OpenOffice's menu commands, dialog boxes, and settings often vary only slightly from those of the corresponding Microsoft Office applications, I found the switch to OpenOffice's Writer and Calc applications easy.

And because OpenOffice is free, I can install the program on every one of the PCs I use, whether it runs Windows, Linux, or OS X. You can get your copy, or copies, from our usual download page under the "Office Software heading.

<http://www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/links.htm>

There are a couple of reasons why I haven't given up Office 2003 entirely. For one thing, I maintain several important databases in Access. Unfortunately, OpenOffice's Base database program is not a replacement for Access. Base can't read and save Access files the way Writer does with Word files, Calc does with Excel files, and Impress does with PowerPoint files.

Another reason I keep a copy of Office around is because OpenOffice lacks anything similar to Outlook. One alternative is to use OpenOffice with Yahoo's free Zimbra Desktop service in place of Outlook.

<http://www.zimbra.com/products/desktop.html>

Compatibility with Office file types remains a problem for OpenOffice and other Office alternatives. Before you make the switch, open your most important Office documents in the Office replacement of your choice to ensure that the files look and function as expected.

OpenOffice opens and saves files in .doc, .xls, and .ppt formats (among others), usually without a problem. In my experience, however, those documents may not always look and behave exactly as they do in Microsoft Office.

You can protect yourself from unwanted surprises by opening and printing a generous sampling of key files you've exchanged with co-workers and clients. More importantly, keep an old copy of Office installed on at least one of your computers, just in case.

Stick with standard Office file formats

You can minimize file-compatibility issues by standardizing on the most common file formats. By default, OpenOffice.org saves files in Open Document Format (ODF). Microsoft's by-the-book support for ODF, unfortunately, breaks some spreadsheet files, according to a recent ZDNet blog post.

OpenOffice reads and writes Office 2007's default .docx and .xlsx XML file formats. But the older .doc and .xls formats are still the ones most often used. I suggest that you make these classic Office formats your defaults in OpenOffice. To set .doc as the document default, for example, open any OpenOffice program and do the following:

Step 1. Choose Tools, Options;

Step 2. Select General under Load/Save;

Step 3. Click Text Document under Document type in the Default file format and ODF settings section;

Step 4. Choose Microsoft Word 97/2000/XP in the Always save as drop-down menu and click OK.

To make .xls the default worksheet format, open the same dialog box and follow the same steps, with the following differences:

Step 1. Choose Spreadsheet under Document type in the Default file format and ODF settings section;

Step 2. Choose Microsoft Excel 97/2000/XP in the Always save as drop-down list and click OK.

Our Best Selling Monitor Down in Price.

The best sites for taking Office files online

Both Office and OpenOffice are tied to a specific computer. If you're like me, you're constantly bouncing from one PC to another.

If you long to store your documents in the Internet, where you can reach them any time from any Internet-connected PC — make Google Docs your first stop.

<http://www.google.com/google-d-s/intl/en/tour1.html>

As with OpenOffice, be sure to upload, open, and print a representative sampling of your existing documents in Google Docs to check for compatibility before you make a permanent switch. Google's Web-hosted document, spreadsheet, and presentation apps offer far fewer features than their counterparts in MS Office and OpenOffice.

However, because your Google Docs files are online 24/7, you're not the only person who can access your stuff via the Net. You can also share the files with other Google Docs users. And it's no surprise that Google Docs can also be seamlessly integrated with Gmail.

You may find that Google Docs and the similar, collaboration-oriented ThinkFree Online Web apps are too streamlined for you.

<http://member.thinkfree.com/member/goLandingPage.action>

If so, try Zoho Office, a Web service that offers feature-rich word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation applications.

<http://www.zoho.com/>

Zoho Office matches Google Docs' offline support via Google Gears (in the Writer application only) and provides a dozen more free apps. Zoho even has a plug-in for Microsoft Office that lets you open, edit, and save Zoho-hosted files in Word, Excel, or PowerPoint themselves.

You can do the same trick with an extension called OpenOffice.org2GoogleDocs. This bit of software is available on the OpenOffice.org site.

<http://extensions.services.openoffice.org/project/ooo2gd>

Despite its name, the OpenOffice extension also supports Zoho and WebDAV servers.

Microsoft offers a similar tool through its free Office Live Workspace.

<http://workspace.officelive.com/en-us/>

The software giant reportedly also plans to make online capabilities a part of the upcoming Office 2010.

We've had a spate of customers in the surgery recently with broken flat screen monitors. Most of these seem to be low cost models purchased from PC World, Staples and even Tesco. Some are still under warranty but the repair procedure from most of the box-shifters seems to be "Send it back to the manufacturer for a few weeks whilst waiting for parts, and hope the customer buys a new one".

The sad truth is, the manufacturer doesn't even keep parts for entry level screens because they know there is not a hope in hell's chance that it will be repaired, it's just not economic. Screens are not alone, entry level printers, scanners and even laptops are not designed to be repaired. This is one of the reasons why they are so cheap in the first place, (no warehouse of spare parts needed).

So what to do, buy a new cheap monitor every nine months and throw the old one?

This doesn't seem very environmentally friendly or good sense financially.

The better answer is to spend an extra few pounds on your screen and get a good warranty, preferably three years. As a by-product you generally also get a better quality screen as well.

The flat screens we sell all come with a 3 year swap-out on-site warranty. Most of our business customers demand this level of back-up. But there is no reason why domestic customers should not be entitled to that same level of support.

By buying in bulk we've managed to reduce the price of our Hyundai 19" widescreen monitor from £132 down to £119 inc. vat.

Plus if you're buying a replacement PC tower, (prices start at £286) we can bundle the screen for just £99.

This offer will only be available while stocks last so if you are thinking about a new screen, do it now!

Call in, buy online to reserve at shop or courier delivery.

http://www.computerdoctors.uk.net/shop/sp_offers.htm



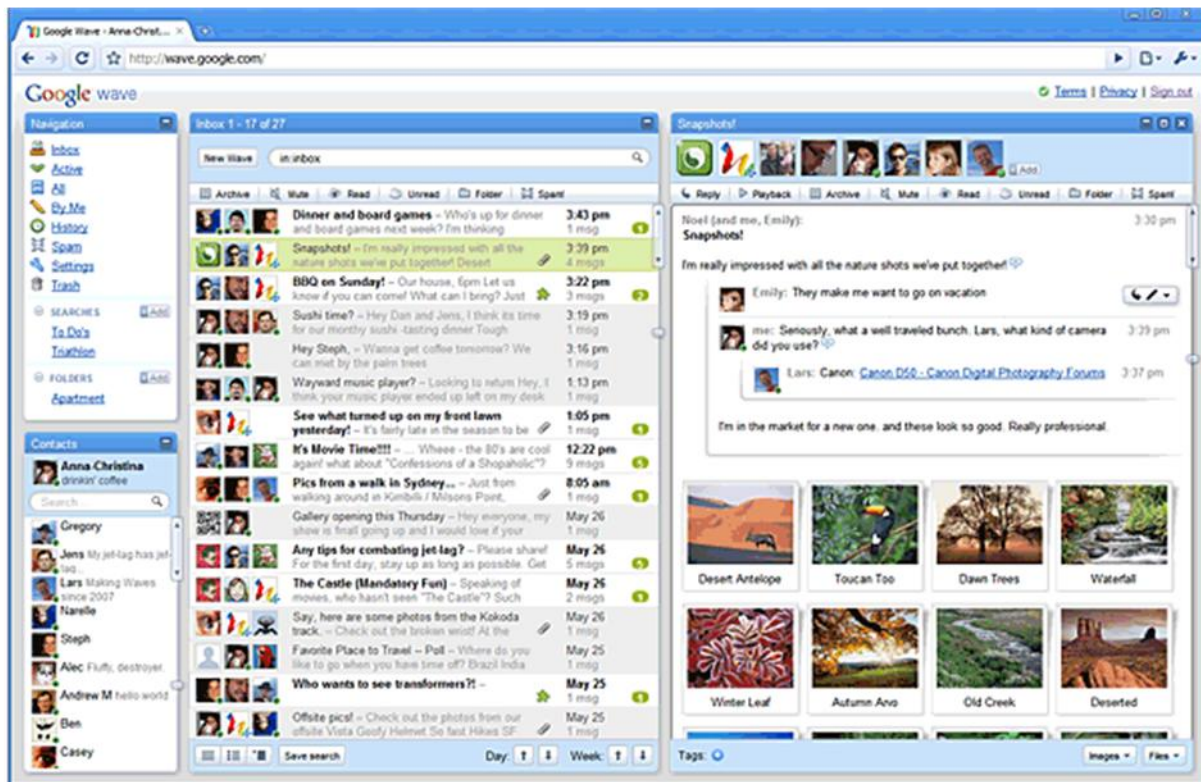
Google "Wave" may Swamp Microsoft

Recently, Google announced at its developer's conference a brand new product called Google Wave. It won't be available to the public for a few months but it looks like a real winner.

So what is it?

Well here's how they described it at Mashable.com:

" ... a new in-browser communication and collaboration tool that is already being hailed by some as the next evolution of email ... the concept behind Google Wave is to "unify" communication on the web. It's a hybrid of email, web chat, IM, and project management software. It features the ability to replay conversations because it records the entire sequence of communication, character by character. Because of this, discussions are also live in Google Wave: you will see your friends type character-by-character. The features don't stop there, either. Google Wave also supports the ability to drag attachments from your desktop into Google Wave. It loads that file and sends it immediately to anyone in the conversation. It's also embeddable, so you can embed Google Wave conversations on any blog..."



It's hard to make a judgement without using the product but it strikes me as an inspired idea that fills a real need. It brings together in one place a whole series of disparate elements in a way that that will potentially change our way of working. Kind of like email for the Facebook generation..

Will it take off? Well that fact that Google have made the API (and much of the app code) Open Source is really going to help. That's the sort of thing Microsoft would never do.

And if it takes off, it won't only be Microsoft who will be worried. Indeed the owners of MySpace, Facebook and Twitter should really start thinking about some of those attractive purchase offers they have recently rejected.

If you want to get ahead of the pack, have a look at :

<http://wave.google.com/>

A mouse for your laptop

If you are one of those people that still struggle to get to grips with your laptop touchpad because you don't want the hassle of carrying around a separate mouse, then this is for you.

The Belkin retractable mouse measures just 3" top to bottom and is amazingly usable. All the usual features of a two button optical wheel mouse plus it winds its own cord when your finished.

Available in our shop £8.95.



Internet users still fooled by online scams

Online scams that aim to infect users' computers with malware and viruses or secure the person's bank details are still catching people out, it has been claimed.

According to new research conducted by VeriSign, fake websites are still proving an effective way for cybercriminals to capture people's usernames and passwords.

Illegally obtained information can be used to hack into email and social networking accounts or spread viruses through a variety of mediums.

VeriSign claims that 88% of those polled had no idea what to look for, even if they suspected a site of being fraudulent.

It concluded that the majority of users were not aware of the padlock symbol used to denote a website that is secure and many did not even check the URL (web address) to ensure it was related to the website they were trying to visit.

Does adding software always slow things down?

Ask the Doctor

Ronald Long's PC is loaded with an impressive amount of software. But something he read made him wonder whether having all that software is wise:

"It seems to be a common perception that Windows runs more slowly after some period of time. We all know about deleting temp files, cleaning the Registry, defragging the hard disk, etc. Recently, I saw something that was new to me: the more programs you have installed, the slower your system will become. Using *Power Tools Software Manager*, I found that I have 276 installed programs.

"Of course, we know about programs that run at startup, but assuming that I have only one other program running, the only reason I can see that the assertion could be true is that each program has entries in the Registry, making the Registry large. What do you think?"

Technically, the statement is true: the Registry will be larger and take fractionally longer to read into memory and parse. Some software may pre-emptively load various elements and subsystems in anticipation of later use — before the software is actually launched — which can take a little extra time at startup and consume some memory and file handles.

And of course, having many files of any sort makes defragging, indexing, and other system maintenance take longer. So yes, the more software you install, the slower your PC may become.

More importantly, the more programs you have running, the slower your system can become. For most real-world purposes on healthy PCs, I agree with you, Ronald: simply having a well-behaved program sitting inert on your hard drive shouldn't have any significant effect on performance after startup.

Slowdowns don't happen so much from the mere existence of software on your system but rather from configurations, conflicts, misbehaviour, and poor maintenance. Avoid those and you can load a Windows PC to the gills.

Tech support.

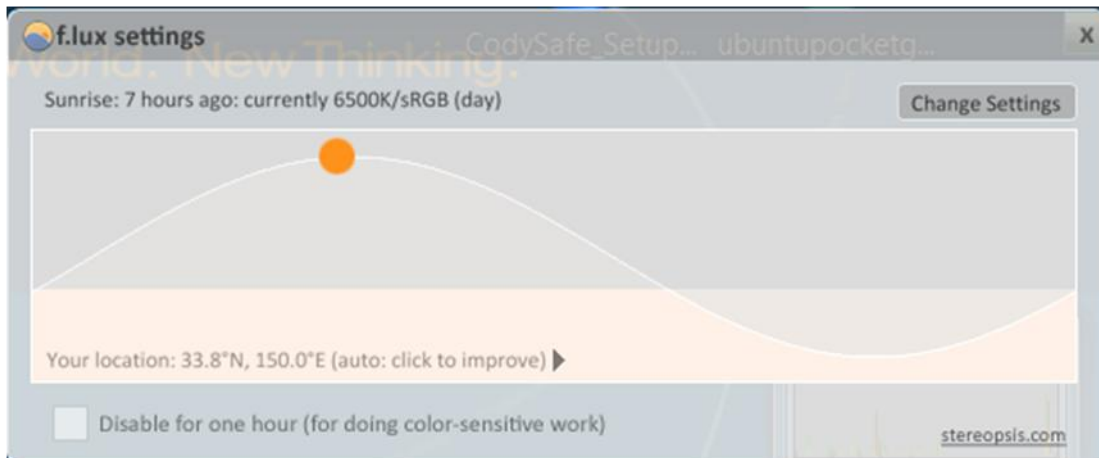
If you have a problem that you would like answering, just go to :

<http://www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/askthedoc.htm>

How to Make Your PC Easier on Your Eyes

What a clever idea. F.lux is a freeware program that adjusts the colour of your screen depending on the time of day. So at night, F.lux makes the screen look warmer and less glaringly blue than during the day. The end result is a screen that is much easier on the eyes.

F.lux works by changing the colour temperature of your display. The default setting is 3400K for night and 6500K for daytime. This can affect colour sensitive work such as editing digital photographs but there is a disable switch that allows you to turn F.lux off.



The change in colour is automatic based on estimated sunrise and sunset times for your location. The location is only a guess based on your time zone settings but you can enter an exact latitude and longitude if you wish.

Versions are available for Windows XP/Vista, Mac OS X and Linux. The Windows download is 545KB.

<http://www.stereopsis.com/flux/>

Want a new PC but not the hassle of changing?

I was talking to a PC salesman who works for a large PC retailer, who shall remain nameless, but starts with PC and ends with World, and he told me the one thing that stopped most people buying a new PC when their old one was past it, was the horrendous job of getting it set up on the internet and transferring their documents and photos etc.

He added, proudly, "any customer that buys a PC from us can have it installed by the Tech Guys for only £89.99"!

"That's interesting", I said, "any customer that buys a PC from us can have it installed for £29.36". A saving of over £60. "Even our charge for installing a PC purchased from another retailer is only £58.72, still over £30 cheaper than the Tech Guys"

At this point, realising he'd lost the "my company's better than yours" debate, finished off the last of our free coffee and slunk off.

So if the thought of changing your PC fills you with dread, think again. Our engineer will do all he can to minimise the stress and allow your new PC to seamlessly take over from where your old one left off. If your fearful of losing your old files, we can put your old hard drive in a USB caddy that you can plug in anytime in the future to retrieve a file. All our new PC's and laptops come with a month's free Remote Access Support, so if you have any problems just give us a call and we'll sort it out while you watch.

Call or visit our shop. <http://www.computerdoctors.uk.net/shop>

Win a PC Competition is an Amazing Success.



Last year when we offered a "£35 of your next repair" voucher, we naively thought we would be inundated.

We posted 1000 leaflets as a trial before sending out the remainder to the 3,500 customers on our database.

From that 1000, we received just 15 requests for vouchers!

The other 2,500 leaflets naturally went in the bin and our sales director was signed up for a marketing course!

Whether by good luck or genius he seems to have pulled it off this time.

We had a tremendous response to the "win a PC" competition.

Although I have to say that only 30% of the entries were correct. The first question [What is the cost each month of domestic \(Home user\) "HomeCare support" including the "Advanced Security Pack" upgrade?](#) Seemed to pose the biggest problem. The correct answer was £8.99, which is made up of £6.99, (the standard domestic customer charge), plus £2 for the advanced security pack.

The correct answers to the other questions are shown below:

Q2. [What are our surgery opening hours, Monday to Friday, to get your PC repaired or upgraded, while you wait?](#)

A. 9.00am—6.00pm.

Q3. [If you bring your PC to our surgery, what is the cost of a fixed price PC or laptop repair, plus parts?](#)

A. £68.49. (Over 50% of people entering thought we would charge £199.99 plus parts for a standard repair, although that is the cost of a laptop repair [including](#) parts).

Q4. [How much discount do "HomeCare" customers get off all fixed price repairs?](#)

A. 20%

Q5. [If you had a problem with our newsletter email constantly going into your junk or spam email folder, which link on our website would you click for instructions on how to prevent this?](#)

A. Problems receiving our newsletter?

At the end of June, when the competition closed, we had over 150 correct entries so it went down to a draw for the winning entry. Just to show fair play we seconded a passing customer, that had just popped in for a USB memory stick, and who had not entered the competition, to pull the winning entry from a sealed box.

We are very pleased to say that the winning entry was from Mr Henry Worthy of Northampton. Unfortunately, Mr Worthy is not able to accept delivery until the second week of July, which is after our newsletter gets mailed. So we will bring you the picture of a happy Mr Worthy receiving his prize in next months issue.

New Email Virus has been Detected

Internet users have been warned about a new threat to their online security, which comes in the form an email claiming to be a legal action against illegal file sharing.

The spam campaign was detected by Red Condor on Monday June 22nd and draws attention to recent activity on websites commonly used to download and share copyrighted music, movies and software.

It mentions a variety of websites including Btjunkie, SumoTorrent isoHunt and Mininova.

The email reads: "We have a report about the copyrighted movies, music, software you downloaded or searched on these WebPages. We strongly advise you to stop any future activities regarding the downloading of illegal content or you can expect prosecution."

We strongly advice all our customers not to reply to any emails of this nature or click any links in the email.

We were so impressed with the response from our "Win a PC" competition that we've decided to have a competition EVERY MONTH!

Unfortunately, it won't be a new PC package every month but it will still be something worth taking the time to enter.

This month we have an Epson D68 Printer. High Resolution photo edition, 5,760dpi, 17 pages per minute.

These are on our website for £53.51. We're also throwing in an extra set of black and colour genuine Epson DURABrite cartridges (as well as the ones that come with the printer), worth £31.28 from Epson (but can be purchased for about £25 if you shop around) and a free USB cable to connect to your PC. Free fitting completes the package, don't be slow—have a go. Competition ends 28th July. Anyone who lives in our service area can enter, not just existing customers. So don't be mean, tell all your friends and give them a chance at winning a cracking prize.



As usual there is a few easy questions to answer but all the answers will be on our website. **Good Luck**

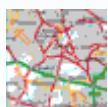
www.computerdoctors.uk.net/competition

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If this has been passed to you from a friend and you would like your own regular copy, just go to:

www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/newsletter.htm



Map to our Northampton Workshop
www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/map.htm

General information & to book a call out
Tel: 01604 411 444 (9-6 Mon-Fri, 9-1 sat)

Sales & On-Line Purchases
Tel: 01604 415 984 (9-6 Mon-Fri, 9-1 sat)
Fax: 0871 251 9099
Email: sales@computerdoctors.uk.net

Shop: www.computerdoctors.uk.net/shop

Technical Support
Free: tech@computerdoctors.uk.net

Remote: www.computerdoctors.uk.net/care

Web: www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/askthedoc.htm

Email test Facility:
mail.computerdoctors@keme.co.uk

