

Doctors Orders

Hello all and welcome to the August edition of our newsletter. I say "all" but if you discount all the people that are on holiday, that leaves a total readership of 3 customers and a few of my closest relatives.

Still, I suppose those who missed it can read the newsletter when they get back. They'll really wish they hadn't acquired sunburn and alcoholism when they realise what bargains and special offers they have missed. Yeah right!

Anyway, we have a fun packed edition full of the usual viruses, spyware and Microsoft & Google world domination plans.

Other than all that, we have a great new competition to win a wireless router and complete installation, as well as a voucher to get £40 off a laptop, which only lasts a fortnight, so the holiday revellers might lose out.

However, this month I shall be mostly Twittering!

For those that think that I've finally lost the plot, fear not. I've now got a Twitter account so all you Twits out there can follow me on Twitter and be the first to get new tools & products, and exclusive offers from Computer Doctors.

For those who've never heard of Twitter, have a look at my link below and think about signing up. Its free and it's a good way of keeping in touch with friends and relatives. You can "follow" the "Tweets" (short messages) of anyone you like, including film stars and your favourite soap stars, there are lots on there.

Also, you can mail me direct via twitter if you have a problem with your PC and I will do my best to help, and if I don't know the answer, I know a few engineers who certainly will. So don't be bashful, give it a go, you can even form a network online with your old school and follow the tweets of all your old school friends.

Unfortunately, when the boss tried to link up with his old school, it turned out that they had converted it into an abattoir. Just as well really, the sort of tweets you would get from the inmates of "Peckham Reform School", would probably make your hair curl!

Don't forget to enter our new competition and remember there's a winner every month.

Craig the Trainee

<http://twitter.com/CraigtheTrainee>



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Internet Explorer 8 is safe to download - we think!

After much to-ing and fro-ing we have finally decided that its safer to upgrade to IE 8 than it is to stick with IE7. That's not to say that IE8 is perfect, its far from that, but it seems that Adobe has updated their IE plug-in and while it works with IE8, it causes problems for IE7.

If you are not familiar with plug-ins, they are the small programs that run inside Internet Explorer, or any other browser for that matter, that allow you to view a wide range of content from within your browser window.

For example, Internet Explorer cannot, by itself, display highly animated web sites. But, because Internet Explorer can be extended, another company called Macromedia has created a plug-in called Flash, which can display multimedia web sites. Also, Internet Explorer does not have a search toolbar. Google, for example, has developed such a toolbar. Internet Explorer supports browser plug-ins and BHOs (Browser Helper Objects).

Plug-ins are small programs that extend the capabilities of the browser in a specific way - giving you, for example, the ability to play audio samples or view video movies from within your browser.

Browser Helper Objects (BHOs) are small programs that can observe and control almost everything that Internet Explorer is doing. For example, a Browser Helper Object gets notified every time you browse to a new page and every time you download a new program.

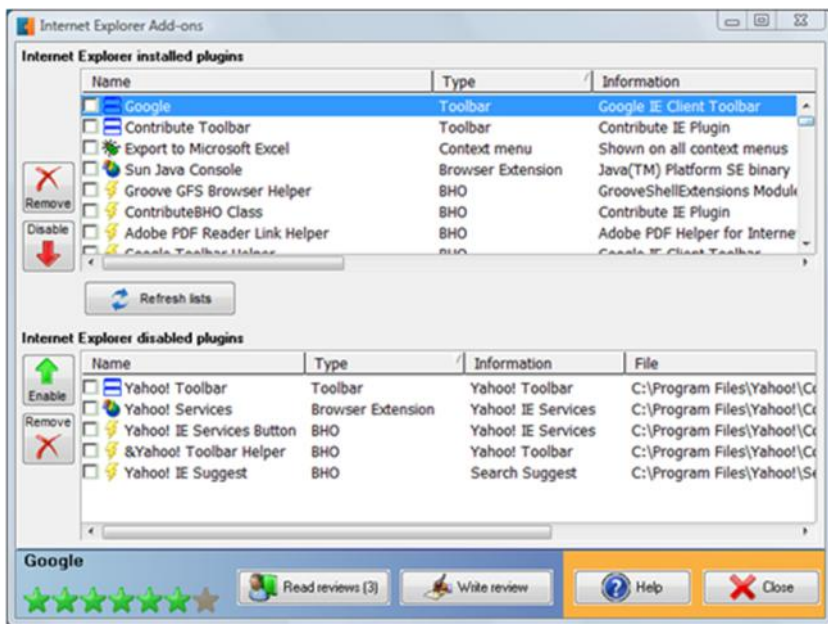
Many applications you install on your computer can also install a BHO or a plug-in. Some examples:

The FlashGet download manager installs a BHO which allows FlashGet to find out every time you download a flash file, and take control of that download in order to help you download better.

The Adobe Viewer is a program which views PDF files. When you install it, it also installs an Internet Explorer plug-in which allows you to view PDF files inside Internet Explorer.

There are also some examples that are not so nice: spyware and adware makers have developed Internet Explorer BHOs which help them track the pages you visit and your purchase habits on the web. Many times, these plug-ins and BHOs are badly written and crash or slow down Internet Explorer.

The Internet Explorer Plug-ins tool allows you to disable or uninstall plug-ins and BHOs. (Tools/Manage add-ons. If you can't see the top menu bar press the Alt key)



In the upper list, you can see all the Internet Explorer plug-ins and BHOs that are installed on your computer.

The Disable button disables a plug-in or BHO and moves it to the bottom list. Disabling a plug-in or BHO means that it won't be loaded or used by Internet Explorer, so it won't have any influence on your computer.

The Remove button directly removes and erases a plug-in or BHO.

You can, at any time, enable a plug-in or BHO by pressing the Enable button.

If you use the IE Plug-ins tool to disable some spyware/adware, we recommend you to also use the Startup Manager tool and carefully examine your startup programs.

Some spyware BHOs come together with programs that run at startup.

The plug-ins tool is not specifically designed to remove spyware and we would always recommend using Spybot or similar in preference to manually hacking each individual file. But if you are having problems with a particular plug-in, it does allow you to temporarily disable it.

Blu-Ray drive fails to install.

Ask the Doctor

A customer's Windows setup lost partial control of her optical drives:

"I'm running Vista Home Premium on my PC, which came with only one CD/DVD-ROM drive. Recently, I added an internal Blu-ray drive. A while after installation, I realized that I could no longer right-click either of these two drives to close the CD/DVD tray (you know, when one clicks on the Start button and opens the computer's window where one has all the drives listed).

"Oddly enough, I can still open the tray with the same manoeuvre. I don't know how to fix it, and I've been browsing the Web for the past three weeks with no luck at all."

This happened after installing a new drive, so let's look at the hardware and software associated with that.

First, make sure all cables are properly inserted and correct for the installation. If you reused old cables or connectors with the new drive, try changing these for new ones.

Next, download and save the latest driver from the drive manufacturer's support pages. Uninstall the current software driver for the malfunctioning drive and install the new driver; both actions can be done from inside Device Manager. For more information on using Device Manager in Vista, see the tutorial on Windows Vista Forums.

<http://www.vistax64.com/tutorials/171469-uninstall-device-device-driver.html>

Microsoft Knowledge Base article 283658 provides information on using XP's Device Manager.

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/283658/en-us>

If the hardware connections are OK and a new driver doesn't help, my guess is a defective drive, and I suggest you send it back for refund or exchange.

Need a Chart? Try one of these free online tools.

If you need to create charts or graphs, this list of seven chart generators can help.

The interfaces range from sparse but utilitarian to rich graphics. Some of the sites create one type of chart, like a pie chart.

All are free to use, though one site does require free registration before you can use it.

<http://www.listfied.com/online-chart-creation-tools>

Where did this setup.exe process come from?

Ask the Doctor

One of our customers found software attempting to set something up on his PC, but he has no idea what it might be:

"I have an unknown setup.exe running on my Vista system. None of my software was updating itself at the time I first saw it, and nothing was logged in the event log. I checked everywhere I could but still haven't found out what this setup.exe was doing. It got me worried."

Normally, you can identify an unknown process by searching its name on the Web. But an unknown, generically named setup.exe running on your PC is downright scary: it could be anything. Good for you for catching it!

But there's help: In Vista, you can track down just about any running software by pressing Ctrl+Alt+Del to open Task Manager, selecting the Processes tab, right-clicking the process in question, and selecting Properties. This opens a window that displays the file's location on your hard drive, its security settings, its compatibility settings, and so on.

That's often enough in itself to let you identify mystery software. (And here's some good news: It looks like Windows 7 will retain this excellent Vista feature.)

XP and previous versions of Windows lack an easy way to identify running processes. However, the free Process Explorer utility is a professional-level tool that shows what "owns" any process on your PC, where the software is physically located on your drive, and more. The software also runs on Vista.

Process Explorer is available from Microsoft as a standalone download or as a live, Web-based tool. More info and full instructions are on the product's TechNet page.

<http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/sysinternals/bb896653.aspx>

With that free tool, you'll be able to track down that setup.exe — or any other mystery process — in no time!

Is Windows Update taking over your Computer?

We have recently become aware of a bug in Microsoft's Automatic Updates service which is causing serious problems for Windows users.

Many readers have reported seeing updates being installed at shutdown or reboot time without any notification, much less an opportunity to select which updates will or will not be applied.

Several customers have confirmed that Automatic Updates (AU) has a problem. Some report that their shutdown options gave no indication that updates were about to be installed. Also, some customers who had configured Automatic Updates to "download only" or "notify only" indicate that AU mysteriously changed to "install updates automatically" against their wishes.

While we await Microsoft's explanation for this aberrant AU behaviour, many tech news sources have picked up on the story and corroborated the forced updates.

ZDNet writer Adrian Kingsley-Hughes was one observer who'd previously encountered the problem, although he didn't feel at the time that he had enough evidence to go public:

"So far, I've not been able to replicate this issue. However, I have been receiving reports of these stealth updates for a while now."

For the many people we heard from who've had first-hand experience with this bug, the last thing they want to do is replicate the behaviour.

Storm brewing over unexpected update behaviour

The most-common example of the AU bug — patches being installed without warning at Windows shutdown — can cause serious problems, as Tom King found out earlier this month:

"In July, our area was hammered by storms and our home was among those to lose power. I have a Windows XP PC and a Mac mini computer in a home office.

"The computers were now running on a limited-time battery backup unit, (UPS) which normally allows adequate time for normal shutdown of the Mac and Windows PC computers. I proceeded to shut down the Mac and the XP PC, where I had been watching the weather reports. On the Mac, I selected a forced shutdown, and within seconds the Mac was ready to be unplugged. But the Windows PC turned out to be a much different experience!

"I next moved on to the PC and selected the Turn Of Computer option on the menu bar. Much to my horror,

the Turn Off Computer window showed the Install Updates icon over the red Turn off button. I thought, 'How could this be happening?' since I had previously set Automatic Updates to download updates for me but let me choose when to install them.

"With the power to the house out and the computer running on a battery backup, it's not the time for Windows to spend the next several minutes casually installing updates without asking! After nervously waiting about a minute — and with no end in sight for the uninvited Windows update — I reached around to the PC's power switch, turned it off (update still in progress), and unplugged the machine....

"Microsoft won no points with me that night, they chose to usurp my control of my computer at the worst possible time! I feel fortunate that the Registry didn't crash....

"Perhaps it's well past time Microsoft respects who owns the computers they commandeer and who is in the best position to know when updates can safely be applied!"

Even in calm weather, the consequences of unanticipated updates can wreak havoc with a single PC or an entire network, as another PC repairer we spoke to, found out one recent morning:

"My customers run the D3 database by Tiger Logic. It runs as a system service, with access to it via ODBC or Telnet.

"I have been forced to set all of their machines to 'Download updates but let me choose when to install them' because Windows does not do a clean shutdown if a reboot is required when updates are automatically installed. On a normal shutdown, the database will wrap up its processes and ports and shut down cleanly; then Windows shuts down....

"Probably half a dozen times a year, a customer will have a problem on Wednesday morning where the machine has installed updates and then automatically rebooted. When I check the settings, yup, that machine now reads 'Install updates automatically.'

"I can guarantee that none of my customers has the technical skill or know-how to reset the setting, and neither I nor my staff ever would. It was not forgotten at machine install, for the simple reason that we always do it; more importantly, it may be a machine that is several years old. I have had a couple of instances where the same machine has reset itself two or three times over the course of a couple of years.

"I have been totally unable to find a pattern. In general, I patch all machines regularly. It doesn't seem to matter whether it's XP or 2003 — the database runs under either, and if the network has fewer than 10 users, XP is more than adequate. The only guess I've had in a couple of

cases is that the updates hadn't been done for several months, but that doesn't hold true for every instance, either."

Mysteries abound in relation to this AU bug, which clearly dates back much farther than Microsoft's extra-heavy 9th June patch extravaganza.

More evidence of behind-the-scenes AU changes

The people who have the most experience with unexpected AU behaviour are those who fix PCs for a living. Another PC repairer says:

"I run a computer repair shop , and I choose the option 'Notify me but don't automatically download or install them' for my personal and shop computers and most clients. I've seen Microsoft updates being installed at shutdown on several computers the last two weeks. I've double-checked those computers to make sure the appropriate option had been chosen for updates, and indeed it had been set to my standard mentioned above. What's going on."

At least his PCs retained their AU settings. Such is not the case for this amateur enthusiast:

"After hearing about forced updates, I checked my settings, because I noticed an auto-install the other day at shutdown. I always keep the setting at 'download but don't install.' When I checked just now, it was set to 'download and install automatically.' I use XP. Can a malware program change the setting and mimic a true MS update? I changed the setting back to my preference."

Some reports suggest that some well-known security programs silently reconfigure AU to "automatically install." It's also possible that a malware infection caused the change to AU settings. Some malware programs turn on AU as a defence against other intruders, whose routines often try to kill off any competing infections.

So are we saying don't allow windows to update?

No we are not! Most of our customers have neither the time or the inclination to check each update and uninstall it if it gives problems. Most of these updates are security updates and we need them. Our criticism is not with the updates, just the means of delivery.

We often see PC's, laptops especially, with no service packs at all. The best antivirus and anti-spyware in the world will not keep you safe without the bedrock stability of the service pack updates.

Current service packs are: Windows XP - SP3, Windows Vista - SP2.

Windows key / Pause Break key, will tell you which service pack you have installed.

Want to upgrade to Windows 7 when the time comes?

Lots of our customers, are asking us if Windows 7 is worth waiting for. In case you don't know this is the replacement for Windows Vista, which replaced Windows XP (which most people still use).

Lots of people have purchased a new PC with Windows Vista installed and because it is fairly different to XP, have had problems finding their way around it.

Many are reading the hype from Microsoft and believe that Windows 7 is going to have the friendly face of Windows XP.

Sorry to disappoint but Windows 7 looks as much like Vista as Vista!

However, under the bonnet there are many improvements that geeks like us will be pleased with, but will our average customer really see much difference? I don't think so.

Windows 7 is due for release around September / October and a bit nearer that time you may start to see new PC's with Vista installed but with options to upgrade to Windows 7 when it's released. If you get this option for free, then you might as well take it.

But what if you have a vista PC already, should you upgrade to Windows 7 when it is released? Personally, I don't think its worth the cost. Even though Curry's are selling upgrade disks for around £50 which you can only use when Windows 7 is released. Imagine the hostility in curry's the day after release when everyone wants their money back as their PC's look just the same.

The improvements under the bonnet do mean that Windows 7 will be less demanding than Vista, so may well run OK on late XP machines without too many problems. You may need a bit more RAM, but if you have a dual core processor you should be OK.

An extra decision to make on upgrade is whether to install the 32 bit version or 64 bit version. The 64 bit version runs faster and can make use of RAM over 3.4Gb but many manufacturers adamantly refuse to spend the money to create 64-bit drivers for older hardware. After all, they make money by selling new hardware, and 64-bit compatibility doesn't rate very high on their list.

So if you really still want to take the plunge click on the link below and download Microsoft's "Windows 7 upgrade adviser", which will examine you PC and tell you if your PC is up to it.

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-7/upgrade-advisor.aspx>


£40 discount on all laptops from shop

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Please present this voucher at our shop at the address below to claim your £40 discount on any laptop we have in stock.

**Computer Doctors Ltd
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Offer ends Saturday
15th August 2009



If you are thinking of buying a laptop in the next 2 weeks then this is a great opportunity to get £40 discount on the laptop of your choice.

Just print page 6 of the newsletter and bring it with you when you come to our shop.

To view which laptops we have in stock go to:

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

20% discount on all Fixed Fee Prices

Want to know how to get **20% discount** on all our fixed fee prices?

Remote access support is the answer. Not only do you get over half of your PC problems fixed for free while you watch, but you also get a further 20% discount on all fixed fee prices including surgery and on-site repairs. (BusinessCare customers get 20% discount on surgery rates only).

So if we are unable to fix your PC remotely, for example if your PC has a hardware fault and requires an engineer, you can still save 20% on the cost of getting it repaired.

For example the cost of a standard surgery repair is reduced from **£68.49** + parts, to just **£54.79** + parts, and a broken laptop screen repair comes down from **£229.95** to just **£183.96** and that includes the new screen.

Sound too good to be true? Well ask the good proportion of our customers that are already using the scheme. From just **£6.99** per month you get all the advantages mentioned above plus much more described on our website.

How can we do it for this price? Well, less travelling = less burned diesel, so not only are we able to make a small reduction in our carbon footprint for the future. We are also able to significantly reduce your PC repair costs in the present.

If this is for you, please go to : www.computerdoctors.uk.net/care for more info, or call sales on **01604 415 984**

Latest updates

Unpatched hole in Firefox 3.5.1 browser

Normally, whenever you hear "unpatched" and "browser exploit" in the same sentence, you think of Internet Explorer. But right after Mozilla released Firefox 3.5.1 to fix holes in version 3.5, news arrived that a new, unpatched vulnerability in Firefox 3.5.1 could result in a denial-of-service attack.

The good news is that this exploit can't take control of your system. The bad news is that the latest version of Firefox isn't as bulletproof as it should be.

Google readies automatic update of Chrome

Not to be left out, Google announced several updates for its Chrome browser, including a number of security fixes. According to the Google Chrome Releases blog, the patch fixes a JavaScript vulnerability that can be used to attack your system.

One comment to the blog indicates that some Chrome users may not be able to add posts to Facebook after the patch is installed. Chrome updates are applied in the background, normally without requiring the approval of the user. I suspect that Chrome's Facebook glitch will be remedied by the time you read this.

Fix Adobe Reader and Acrobat to close Flash hole

Both IE and Firefox are reportedly vulnerable to an attack that was first seen in the wild two weeks ago. The exploit uses small Flash files, affecting Adobe Reader 9 and Acrobat 9 (both of which execute Flash content embedded in PDF files) and Flash versions 9 and 10.

Using the NoScript extension to Firefox would not necessarily protect you against this attack. That's because some legitimate Web sites might unwittingly serve ads or other content containing infected Flash.

A workaround that does protect against the flaw involves renaming two Adobe .dll files to .dll.old or similar. Renaming these files prevents Reader and Acrobat from executing PDF-embedded Flash. It doesn't, however, protect you from Flash .swf files — for example, ones that are served from Web sites.

As we speak, most antivirus packages do not detect either of the two threat vectors, according to a VirusTotal analysis of the PDF exploit and analysis of the .swf threat. But we are expecting most of the major players to update within the next few days.

Monthly Competition shows up flaws in our website

In just the two months that we have been running our regular competition to win a computer related item, it has become obvious from some of the answers that we have received, that the rates page on our website was difficult to understand.

In the first competition for a PC package, over 50% of applicants thought that we would charge nearly £200 for a standard PC repair in our surgery.

Now if this was correct, these customers would certainly think twice before bringing their PC to us if it went wrong.

The correct answer is, of course, £68.49 but after looking at our rates page we could see where the confusion took place

So we have completely revamped the repair costs web pages to make it easier to find a price for a particular repair or upgrade.

Apart from PC World, we are the only local repairer that publishes all its prices on their website. (As far as I know) and we manage to undercut PC World on every price shown.

Also, to more accurately reflect the costs involved, we have split the standard laptop repair cost into three separate prices. (All cheaper than PC worlds £229.99, I might add). Plus we repair any make, whereas some repairers (including PC world) will not touch "Dell, Acer, Apple, Gateway, Evesham, Asus, IBM, or NEC" laptops.

The most common laptop repair is the same as the standard PC repair **£68.49** + parts and includes everything except motherboard and screen damage.

Second is a laptop motherboard repair costing **£169.95** this is half the cost of a replacement motherboard and includes removing the motherboard, shipping to a specialist repairer and refitting. Also includes the cost of any components replaced on the motherboard.

Thirdly a broken or bleeding laptop screen at **£229.95** (OK only 4p cheaper than PC World, but then they do specifically exclude "physical damage to the screen or case", and our price includes the replacement screen).

So you can see, although the monthly prize costs us, it's money well spent if our customers can now easily see what good value they get from Computer Doctors.

http://www.computerdoctors.uk.net/pages/rates_surgery.htm

P.S. Don't forget, all remote support customers get a further 20% discount on all the above fixed fee prices. (see page 6)

(Quotes from PC word are taken from their website):

<http://www.thetechguys.com/services/fix-price-laptop-repair.shtml>

Did BitTorrent put 100GB of junk files on my PC?

Ask the Doctor

A Customer found what just might be record-breaking clutter on his daughter's PC:

"Temporary and junk files filling up hard drives has been talked about numerous times, but my daughter's computer may take the cake — over 100GB!

"Recently, she has been having issues with only a few gigs free on her drive, so I moved a number of movies off it and got the system working better. Then last week it blue-screened and I couldn't get it to boot (she then told me she had only a few MB of free space left).

"I removed that drive, put it in another system, and went to work with a number of different cleaners and scanners, all of which just locked up. To cut a long story short, I finally just used the command prompt to get into her temporary Internet files, where I found massive amounts of files — one directory had over 215,000 files. So I let `del *.* /s` go to work and over 24 hours later had recovered 100 gigs of space!

"The question now is, what went wrong and how do I prevent it from happening again?"

The word "movies" in your note jumped out at me. That — coupled with the huge temp-file baggage — strongly suggests to me that your daughter was downloading movies with a P2P (peer-to-peer) file-sharing tool such as BitTorrent. If that's the case, many of the excess files were most likely fragments of the movies she had downloaded and were deliberately left there.



With BitTorrent-like tools, when a user selects a file to download, the software initiates multiple simultaneous downloads, asking different servers for different parts of the same file. Various parts of the file stream in concurrently from multiple servers, so the overall download can go much faster than pulling in the same file in a straightforward, linear way from a single server.

Although the partial files arrive out of sequence, that's OK; once all the pieces reside on the downloading PC, the software then assembles the file pieces into a coherent whole.

When the download's done, most P2P file-sharing tools intentionally retain the downloaded fragments. The idea behind this kind of file-sharing network is for every user's PC to become an ad-hoc server, offering the downloaded file fragments to anyone else who wants them.

Most BitTorrent-type tools let you turn off the default sharing actions, and you usually can tell the software not to save the downloaded files. That helps with the problem of disk space, but note that there still may be a serious legal issue with these kinds of tools.

Although valid uses exist, by far the majority of P2P file-sharing traffic is the distribution of illegal copies of software, music, and movies. Downloading illegal content is bad enough, but once you're on a P2P file-sharing network, you may also be an active participant in the distribution of this illegal material.

Use a file cleanup utility such as Ccleaner regularly and you should never get into this situation again. You can download Ccleaner from our download page.

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

A winner for Last months Printer Competition

Yes we have a winner for last month's competition to win a photo edition Epson Inkjet printer, complete with a second set of inks, USB cable and installation.

The lucky winner was **Mr Matt Wright of Northampton** and his correct answers were:

Q1. If you came to our surgery to have extra RAM memory fitted, what would be the cost (excluding the cost of the RAM memory)?

Answer: Nothing.

Q2. What is the cost of a brand new Viper ZS Home PC tower, keyboard and mouse. Including vat?

Answer: £286.00

Q3. Which of our business laptops has the facility to change the operating system from Vista to XP Professional.

Answer: Acer Extensa

Q4. If you wanted a PC built specially for you, which two manufacturers specialise in customisation and allow you to order online?

Answer: Asus & Shuttle

Q5. If you wanted a wireless router for your NTL/Virgin cable broadband and wanted a bargain. What is the cost of the Belkin - MicraDigital router on our online shop?

Answer: £19.99



Unfortunately, we weren't able to show you the winner of last month's competition. Which was a complete computer package. So as promised, is **Mr Henry Worthy of Northampton**, receiving his prize.

One cynical customer suggested that our monthly competition was a cunning plan to allow all our staff to replace their kit with the latest version, and even more. that we were drawing straws to see who would win this month.

Oh ye of little faith!

As you can see we have real winners and to ensure that there is no jiggery pokery all Computer Doctor's staff and their families are not allowed to enter. D'oh!

This months competition prize is a wireless router. If you have more than one PC or laptop in your home or office and you want to share your broadband Internet connection with each one, then this is the answer.

Whether you have a cable (Virgin media) or ADSL (plugs into a telephone socket) we will supply you with a quality router that not only allows you to share your Internet connection but acts as a network hub for all your PC's so that you can share files between them and even print to your printer from all PC's.

We will also install and configure the router including setting up the wireless security so that your transmissions are safe.

Don't think that you have no chance of winning. Our competition is only open to people in our catchment area (*see below) so give it a try, you never know, yours might be the only entry. You don't have to be an existing customer, so if you already have a router, be nice to your friends and help them with the answers

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

*NN1 – NN18, NN29, MK19, MK40 – MK46, LE16.



Competition ends 28th August

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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

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Shop: www.computerdoctors.uk.net/shop

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Remote: www.computerdoctors.uk.net/care

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

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

