You & Your Computer – Electronic Mail

I would like to welcome readers to this new column –**'You & Your Computer'**. My name is Gavin Baker; I have worked in the computer industry for over 10 years. I have worked in fields as diverse as the NIMROD fighter plane simulator project to faultfinding instruments for overhead power lines. I can be reached at the following email address youandyourcomputer@endhousesoftware.com. In this column I would like to explain an aspect of computer technology in a relaxed manner, giving real-world examples with screen-shots, if appropriate. I will also include pointers where you can find more details if you wish to explore the topic further. I would like to invite readers to email their questions and tips so we can set up a forum to exchange information. Under development is an online discussion forum system where you will be able to discuss any relevant issue – stay tuned for news of the launch date.

"Let me have your email address" is becoming an ever more common request in the today's community. In this article we will take a look at email and its rise in popularity. The telegraph, telephone and fax systems have revolutionised communication between people. During this period people have become more global and have the need to communicate larger amounts of information in multimedia form, comprising of text, images, music, etc. The explosive growth in email usage has also led to it being used as a mass marketing tool – even more prolific than the telephone and postal mail combined. This has led to two main problems, one of junk mail and one of phishing. Phishing is a type of fraud and is becoming a common practice. It usually involves receiving an email (or viewing a webpage) purporting to be from an official source, e.g. your bank stating that they have had a computer crash and have lost your internet banking details. They supply a link that if followed would display a webpage containing a form requesting you to re-enter your details, e.g. your password. The webpage would look genuine, copying the style of your bank's webpages even down to using the bank's logo. BUT the email or webpage is **NOT GENUINE** – if you filled in the form, the information would be sent directly to the criminals and they would log on to your Internet banking account and clean it out! An official source **WOULD NEVER** request personal information in this manner. When you log on to, for example, your Internet banking service always type the full addresses (URL) as supplied by the bank into the browser and **NEVER** click on a link in an email. It is worth stressing here, that if you receive an email from an address you do not recognise, **DO NOT OPEN IT AND DELETE IT IMMEDITELY.**

An email can be thought of as an electronic letter – comprising of two parts, the message, and the addressed envelope. When we send an email, the email client software will deliver your message to the mail server at the location specified by the address. The mail server will then deliver the email to the correct user. The email address is usually in the form of user@domainname – e.g. maryjane@hotmail.com. The user does not necessarily have to be a real person, it could be the name of a department, for example, sales. An email can optionally have a number of files attached, for example your email message could contain details of your holiday with pictures as attached files – any attached file should be no more then 1MB in size or you might experience problems in sending the email.

The simplest way of obtaining an email address is to sign up with one of the web-email providers like Yahoo or Hotmail. These companies provide a free basic email service – for a larger mailbox size and advanced features they charge a small monthly subscription. For example, browse to Hotmail's home page at www.hotmail.com and click on the 'sign up' link. You will have to fill in some forms and choose a username and password and that's it. The advantage of web-email is that the email software, your email and configuration details are stored on the web and as such can be accessed by any machine connected to the Internet. The basic service also includes methods for sorting and storing your mail in a selection of folders, making it easier to find an email. You can also define '*rules'* that will sort your incoming email automatically into folders.

That's it for this week, please send any questions or comments to the following email address youandyourcomputer@endhousesoftware.com or phone the helpline on **690 249 745**. In the next article I will explore how to optimise files you wish to attach to emails and methods of protecting your computer against the bad guys. I also offer a complete range of computer maintenance and web design services at very competitive rates.

By Gavin Baker.