

letters

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CAUGHT NAPPING

The other night, while thinking about which songs I could be grabbing with Napster, I found myself flicking through the cable channels. I happened across a story on CNN that Napster was being taken to court in the US; in a lawsuit seemingly led by Lars Ulrich of Metallica. Poor Lars was very upset that someone had leaked unfinished Metallica tracks and encoded them into MP3s, leaving them for download by Napster users.

It struck me that this was a bit of a retaliatory, knee-jerk reaction. But now, I think I've seen the light. Lars and the entire music industry are aiming at the smallest target. Let's face it, the recording industry has had a problem with MP3s on the Internet since day one, but who is to blame for MP3s existing on the Internet? There are lots of people responsible: the ISPs, the computer manufacturers and the companies that programmed the MP3 encoders.

All of the above are untouchable, though, and Napster is just an easy target to get a beefy, precedent-setting test case under way. I mean, if we follow the logic of the record companies

through, then the creators of all the various FTP, mail and news clients are totally responsible for the spread of illegal porn and wares on the Internet.

The recording industry needs to realise that nothing will stop the spread of MP3s on the Internet and if they do cut the head off this hydra, more will grow back in its place. As a musician myself, I can see where this is all going. The spread of MP3s on the Internet will eventually create a level playing field for all of us. Popularity and fame for musicians will come from writing and playing good, original music; their money will be made by performing. There won't be the money around to launch the careers of 'marketing-oriented' musicians any more, as the record companies will eventually fold under the power of the Internet. Let's be honest, grabbing the one song from a one-hit wonder off the Internet and playing it until you are sick of it is a much more attractive proposition than buying and having to endure the entire album! Is it only me who thinks the recording industry has had this coming for a long time?

One last question remains though:

LETTER OF THE MONTH

CONNECTOR MORSE

What an interesting review of the Amstrad CPC in the *Retro* column of your July issue. My dad bought one when they first came out and it served us well. Around 1992 when I was 14, I got hold of a second CPC464, cast off by a friend who had upgraded to an Amiga.

Being practical and having too much spare time, I decided the best thing to do would be to network the two machines. I couldn't afford serial adaptors and didn't understand the protocols involved, so I drew up my own networking protocol using as a basis, Audio Frequency Morse Code, would you believe, going from the headphone socket on machine A, through my Electronics Experimenter set, to the joystick port on machine B.

Programming machine A with Morse Code was easy, but then I had to decode it. I wrote a Basic program of about 400 lines that timed the pulse received on the joystick port and wrote either a '.' or a '-' to memory. The second stage referred the string of Morse to a directory, including all the Morse

characters and about 50 of the more common words, to enable the computer to transcribe onto the screen as it received. Damn me if it didn't work too, after much tweaking of software, adjusting the electronic connection and choosing a frequency that transmitted well across the room!

After about four weeks I had a working one-way link. Unfortunately, I couldn't use it, as my comms program used about 90 per cent of the 64KB memory. After some experimentation I also succeeded in wireless networking, using a pair of walkie-talkies. But the error rate was pretty high and the range was limited to about 10 metres by the need to suppress noise. I think Bluetooth is a more realistic way of doing this.

I thought at one time I might have a future in PCs, but I was left behind – as were my CPCs – by the rush of expensive new technology. However, here I am, with a new Celeron 500 PC on my desk, a basic web page already set up, and most of my curiosity still intact. Who knows where this may lead...?

CHRIS EMERY

how did unfinished Metallica tracks find their way from the studio onto Napster?

JASON MARK CURLEY

NIALL MAGENNIS replies >

I wouldn't agree that ISPs, computer manufacturers and companies that programmed the MP3 encoders are responsible for the distribution of illegal MP3s. It is those people who encode copyright material as MP3 files and then upload them to FTP servers, web pages and Napster who are solely responsible. You can't blame car manufacturers, road builders and petrol companies for the fact that a tiny minority of people choose to use cars for ram raiding, can you? However, you are probably right that record companies as we know them have had their day.

Nevertheless, I don't think the future is going to be a Utopia for struggling musicians. It's likely that, when they come to their senses, the major record companies will set up their own services similar to Napster, except that they will charge a subscription fee. Napster is not just popular because it's based on piracy, but also because it allows you to download the songs you want, when you want, and from wherever you want.

HAPPY CLOCKERS

Like many PC users, I had sadly come to the stage where my PC was beginning to show its age. Having read several articles on upgrading and being reluctant to spend much money, I decided to delve into the world of overclocking. I used to have a K6-III 400, which was good but not powerful enough for the games I was playing (such as Quake III), but after the wonders of overclocking, I managed to boost my CPU's performance by 25 per cent, pushing it up to K6-III 500 standards.

Having been surprised at how easy and effective this process was, I decided to try overclocking my Voodoo 3 2000 by increasing the core clock speed from 143MHz to 190MHz, way past the standards of even the Voodoo 3 3000. Any gamers would greatly appreciate this increase as it resulted in a 20fps boost in Quake III and Unreal Tournament.

To combat the problem of overheating, I added a small £11 graphics chip fan. Even so, I still made a saving of at least £20 by not buying a Voodoo 3 3000. Having prolonged the life of my PC for the next few months, I felt obliged to inform all other short-of-money PC users about the wonders of overclocking.

Although there is a large risk with overclocking, provided you spend generously on cooling there should be no problem. In the next few months, I am looking forward to buying a 650MHz Athlon and overclocking it to 1GHz.

Considering that a 1GHz Athlon costs around £900 and a 650MHz Athlon costs around £140, along with £60 for heatsinks, fans and thermal transfer paste, I will be saving up to £700 – enough money for a new PC if necessary.

ALISTAIR MACKENZIE

NIK RAWLINSON replies >

Overclocking is perhaps the cheapest way to speed up your machine, but it's not for the faint-hearted. You should also bear in mind that there is a good chance you are invalidating any warranties on either the component with which you are tinkering or even your whole system. That said, with the graphics market moving so fast we'd always welcome a way to prolong the life of our cards. But as games developers embrace new features such as hardware bump mapping, one day the inevitable will happen and all the overclocking in the world won't be able to save your beloved chipset from being added to that pile of components that will one day go to make a 'secondary' machine.

YOU'RE UNSUBSCRIBABLE

Following June's *News* article *Unmetered and indecipherable* I wanted to highlight another problem: 'Unmetered, indecipherable and unsubscribable'. I have been a member of Lineone.net for over a year now and have introduced various friends to the service. Back in February I started to receive promotional emails about its new unmetered service through Quip. I pre-registered and waited in keen anticipation; and lo and behold on 2 April I got my invitation to join.

I quickly logged onto the site, read the conditions and decided to sign up. I completed the registration forms correctly and fully, and it was then that my problems started.

My application was rejected. I tried again using my debit card instead of my Gold credit card and then again with my Egg card, each with the same result. No reason was given. A little upset I emailed



Overclocking may give you a free upgrade, but at the expense of your hardware warranties!



Didn't you get our email? Staying online in France can be a little tricky

both Lineone and Quip. But there was no reply.

A couple of days later I tried again. Again I was rejected. Getting more upset I emailed Lineone and Quip again. This time Lineone invited me to re-apply. No explanation for my rejection was given and only a cursory apology.

I have since tried to register six times using a combination of credit and debit cards (all of which are well within their credit limits), all without success. I have sent over a dozen increasingly irate emails to both Lineone and Quip. No reply from either. Quip also has a service which says it will tell you if your registration has been successful. I emailed it twice. Still no reply!

Once again it seems that BT and the computer industry have sunk to new lows in customer service and satisfaction. Still, it's a novel way to ensure your service isn't over-subscribed – don't let anyone join!

TIM MARCHANT

CLIVE AKASS replies >

Considering the magnitude of the changes hitting service providers at the moment, I'd be very surprised if there were no hiccups. The problem is that there is no foolproof way of predicting demand, either for subscriptions or line time, because both the patterns of use and the demographics of users are changing. It will be weeks, even months, before we will get a clear picture of how unmetered access is working out.

THE PRICE OF ADSL

I was interested in Clive Akass' piece (July PCW) on sharing BT's ADSL connections. It seems to me that BT has become rather confused about precisely what it is selling, ie bandwidth. Both the

single-user and the multi-user lines appear to offer a 512Kbits/sec connection with the significant difference between them being the equipment installed in the customer's premises.

The single-user service is terminated on an ADSL modem with a USB connection, while the multi-user service comes with an ADSL modem and a router. Using a USB connection for the single-user service strikes me as a sneaky way of discouraging sharing.

I have a network of five or six systems at home and as far as I can see the only way I could do sharing over a single-user connection would be to use software such as Microsoft's Internet Connection Sharing or WinGate. I am loath to put a Windows system in the role of gatekeeper between my data and the outside world. I would much rather use a Linux box, but the use of USB effectively rules this out for the foreseeable future.

My preferred solution would be to use a dedicated router, which I can get hold of for around £200, but this doesn't seem to be an option. The only way I can get a 10BaseT termination is with the multi-user service and, in that case, BT insists on providing me with a router.

The net effect is that I have to pay a 150 per cent premium of an additional £60 a month to connect myself to BT's ADSL. Since I live in an area served by NTL's cable system, I am much more inclined to go there for a cable modem, to which I can connect my own router at a cost of £40 a month.

In my opinion BT should separate out the service and equipment provision parts of its ADSL service, providing consumers with a choice of connection

method and including the additional cost of providing a router (if required by the user) in either the installation fee or an increased monthly service charge.

MARTIN KIRK

CLIVE AKASS replies >

BT seems ambivalent on the issue of sharing. Commercial USB-sharing options will certainly become available. Incidentally, you will get a slightly better quality of service on the business ADSL links, as these have a contention ratio (the number of users per link) of 20 to one as opposed to 50 to one on the USB link. BT tells me this is better than in the US, where the ratio is usually between 60 and 80 to one. A more interesting comparison will be with cable, where you will share the bandwidth with all other users on your local loop.

On your last point: BT is due to unbundle the local loop soon, which should open up the market, as you wish.

YOU'VE (NOT) GOT MAIL

Reading Paul Fisher's account of his trials and tribulations with France Telecom in your July issue, I felt I had to share the experience of my cousin and her husband, who live in France.

Last summer I helped them set up their Internet connection on a dedicated line. I have a passing knowledge of PCs but no French, whereas her husband was a PC novice, but was able to speak French. After many lengthy, sometimes frustrating and often amusing three-way telephone conversations, we managed to get the system up and running.

They returned briefly to Britain this year and before doing so accepted an offer from France Telecom to move onto a cheaper tariff for their Internet connection. On their return they were unable to get any response from the Internet. After some time they managed to get hold of someone at France Telecom with the answer. They were told that, when they moved to the new tariff, the telephone number they had to dial to get a connection had been changed. My cousin contacted them to say that it would have been nice if they had let them know about this. The answer came back: 'We did. We sent you an email!' 'Zut alors!', as Paul said.

CHRISTOPHER JOHN

CLARIFICATION

In the introduction to last month's *Reviews* section, we made reference to a fictitious character called Colvin. We would like to make it clear that this character in no way related to Colvin Eccleston or anyone else called Colvin.