Phantom phone menace

Tim Nott relates a creepy connection tale of the unexpected.

Remember the urban legend of the couple who returned from holiday to find that their flat had been broken into? Curiously, nothing appeared to have been taken. More curiously, the intruder left a quarter-full bottle of his or her own Scotch on their desk. The mystery was only solved when the phone bill arrived and the cost of their burglar's whisky-fuelled chat session was revealed.

These days you don't need a burglar — you can get software to bump up your phone bill without your knowing, as Stephen Blake and many others have found out. Stephen wrote: 'A couple of weeks ago, and for no apparent reason, my computer started to connect automatically to my service provider shortly after booting up. This was just the connection: neither my browser nor email software started. This was irritating but not a major problem, and I've now set my parameters to "always ask before connecting" so I can just hit Cancel.
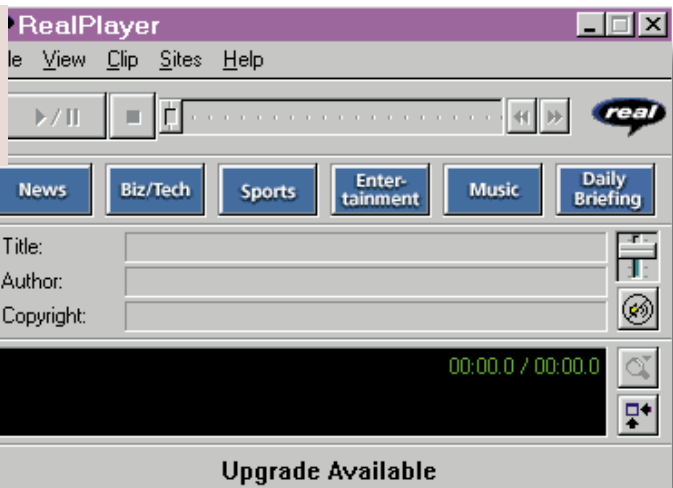
'A friend of mine recently started having the same problem, but as he has an internal modem, he didn't notice. You can guess what his phone bill looked like. In both cases, I cannot find any way of preventing this automatic connection taking place. So I turned to the Microsoft newsgroups on the internet. Here, I found dozens of desperate souls with the same problem. Obviously we all go on the net, but we all seem to use a

variety of ISPs. So why have our PCs started to do this? Conspiracy theorists could have a field day about which site we may have all visited.'

Similar reports abound — some adding that the 'automatically disconnect if idle…' timeout is disabled, as is the prompt to disconnect when you close the browser. The common factor in all these cases seems to be the G2 RealPlayer. If you download this, or its beta, it likes to 'touch base' at frequent intervals to see if a new version is available. Apparently, nobody at RealNetworks realises that courtesies such as asking before using someone else's phone and hanging up when finished are important, especially in the majority of countries where one pays for local calls.

If you're a victim of this, there are three things you can do. First, you can remove the icon from the System Tray, from RealPlayer's Options, General, 'Allow SmartStart to run in the System Tray'. Second, you can disable the upgrade checking for a period of 30 days at a time, from the Options,

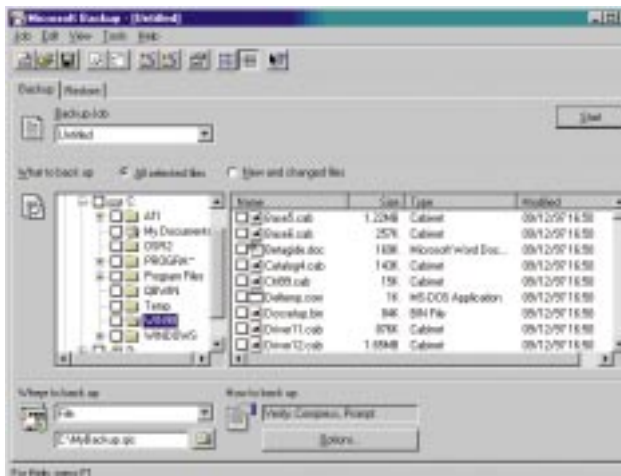Upgrade menu. The third drastic solution is, of course, to uninstall the RealPlayer software.

☛ **Here's some better news.** In January's column I aired Robert Trzebiatowski's problem in that the scroll arrows you get in Windows 98 (or Windows 95+IE4) when a Start Menu level is too tall to fit the screen, won't go away when the number of items are reduced, and end up obscuring the entries. Robert now writes to say that updating his version of Internet Explorer has solved the problem.

Egg, meet face

In December 1998's *PCW* I stated that it's impossible to restore Windows 95 backups in Windows 98. Not so, says Michael Kenward: 'You just have to go about it in the right way — difficult, I know, given the awful interface of the new version. Start 98 Backup. Go to the Restore tab. Find the .QIC file from 95 Backup, open it and away you go.'

More egg (I'm going to need a bigger face, soon) from Nicholas Ward, who states that I'm mistaken in saying you can only open one picture per instance of Internet Explorer. 'If you use the option to open all windows in one browser, it will open all the images selected in the one browser and you simply click on the Back button to scroll through them.'

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Several readers have asked me how they, too, can achieve the 'transparent windows' effect seen in Chris Bidmead's column in December 1998's *PCW* (p273). I had no answer, apart from relinquishing Windows in favour of Unix. But reader Paul Bunyan pointed me at Litestep, the strangest thing I've seen for Windows in some time.

It's a PC version of Afterstep, which itself is a window manager for Unix. It's the brainchild of Francis Gastellu and has attracted a large cult following. If you feel the opportunities for customising Windows are too limited, this could be for you, as it's a complete replacement for the Windows shell. Yes, that screenshot [Fig 1] really is my Windows 98 desktop. The toolbar thingy at the right is the Wharf, which can be used to launch programs, open files or folders, and host applets such as a clock, a system monitor and a virtual screen manager that gives you multiple desktops. More esoteric Wharf applets include a variety of CD controllers and (no kidding) a CPU thermometer.

The Start menu is replaced by a cascading right-click menu (seen here above the Word window), and shortcuts on the desktop can use any bitmaps. The examples shown on the left of the screen are bitmaps of text that 'light up' when the mouse pointer crosses them. Note that although the wharf tiles and shortcut bitmaps can have transparent portions, windows themselves can't, and the seemingly transparent backgrounds to the text shortcuts are actually part of the wallpaper.

However, Litestep isn't for softies. Ideally, you need to be of that rare breed — a programming geek with artistic talents. Even using the ready-made 'themes' (my desktop is a slightly modified version of Psoriac's SpaceStep) you'll find you have to do a lot of configuration editing and file shuffling [Fig 2]. It's also prone to falling over, leaving you in the interesting position of being in Windows with no shell, and there are various other little surprises, such as an apparent loss of the Find File command.

Litestep is free, and is released under the GNU General Public Licence. You are not only free to use the
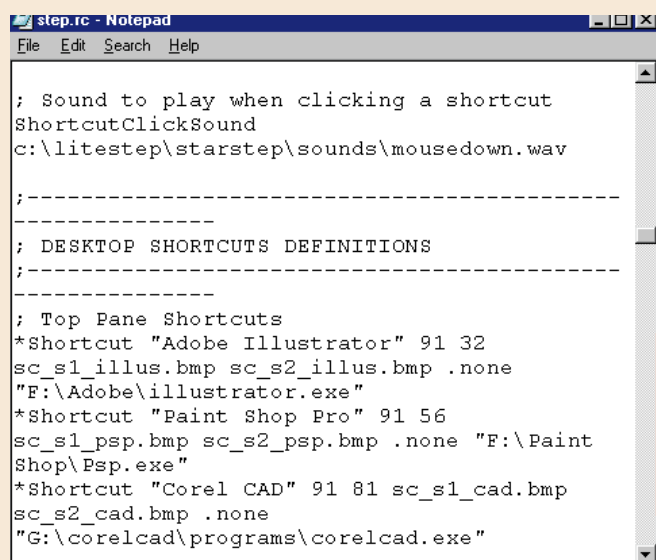

▲ **FIG 1 IT'S WINDOWS, JIM, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT**

program, but free — indeed, expected — to download and modify the source code and generally do whatever you like. Which will probably come as something of a shock to devout Windows users, conditioned as we are to monopolistic marketing practices. Despite the complexity, one very good point is that Litestep does not burrow deep into the Registry or the Windows and System folders. The sole point of contact is via the SHELL=entry in SYSTEM.INI. If this is edited to point back at

EXPLORER.EXE, then normal service will be resumed. Determined meddlers would do well to have a boot disk with a copy of EDIT.COM about their person before diving into the wonderful world of Litestep. The shell itself, and many sample themes, can be downloaded from www.litestep.net.

☛ **Paul also answered** a FAQ about graduated title bars, mentioned in November's column. If you're running Windows 95 and yearn for the shaded title bars and animated menus that 98 users have, you might like to try Win98fx. It's on this month's CD-ROM. Do read the Readme.txt file first as this free utility replaces several crucial Windows files which will need to be backed up beforehand.

◀ **FIG 2 FORGET ABOUT DRAG-AND-DROP: THESE SHORTCUTS IN LITESTEP ARE NOT FOR SOFTIES**
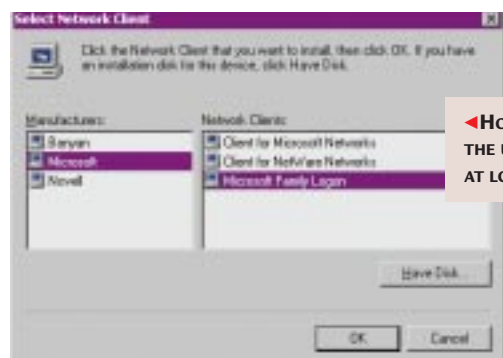


```
; Sound to play when clicking a shortcut
ShortcutClickSound
c:\litestep\starstep\sounds\mousedown.wav

;----------------------------------------
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; DESKTOP SHORTCUTS DEFINITIONS
;----------------------------------------
---------------
; Top Pane Shortcuts
*Shortcut "Adobe Illustrator" 91 32
sc_s1_illus.bmp sc_s2_illus.bmp .none
"F:\Adobe\illustrator.exe"
*Shortcut "Paint Shop Pro" 91 56
sc_s1_psp.bmp sc_s2_psp.bmp .none "F:\Paint
Shop\Psp.exe"
*Shortcut "Corel CAD" 91 81 sc_s1_cad.bmp
sc_s2_cad.bmp .none
"G:\corelcad\programs\corelcad.exe"
```

Questions
& *answers*

Q A friend and I both have Windows 98. I tried to set up multiple user logons for each person to have their own settings. When he logs on, he has a list of all the users to log on as, but when I tried that on my version it wouldn't work — it just gave me the old Windows 95 logon, i.e. Type Username and Password. The weird thing is that my version should be newer than his because my computer is only a week old. Can you help me?

BARA MUSTAFA

a *If you go to Control Panel, Network, you'll see a list of 'Installed Components'. If Microsoft Family Logon is not included*

◄HOW TO GET THE USER LIST AT LOG-ON

here, then hit the Add button, choose Client and select it. The next step is to make sure this is selected as the 'Primary Network Logon' in the box below.

Q I recently bought a new Epson 640 colour printer to replace my old HP 560c. Now when printing I get an error message saying an illegal operation has taken place in ATMSYS.DRV. I cannot find any application that uses this file or ATM32.DLL, which accompanies it. I know they are Adobe Type

Manager files and they're both dated 1992, yet when I try to delete them I cannot do it from Windows as they're "being used". Deleting them from DOS and rebooting brings up an error message while Windows is loading and it simply comes back to the 'Safe to turn off' screen. The only application I can think of that may have used it was an old version of Adobe Photoshop 2.5 from my old machine running Windows 3.1. This didn't work under Windows 95 and so I deleted it.

GEORGE DEETH

a *This is a legacy from your Windows 3.1 days. If you open the file SYSTEM.INI, which you'll find in the Windows folder, with Notepad, you'll find, somewhere near the*

beginning, the line: system.drv=atmsys.drv Change this to: system.drv=system.drv This will stop the Adobe Type Manager loading and you'll be able to delete the files.

Q I've bought an ex-demo PC with Windows 98 pre-installed (I was also given the original CD). I find my Windows folder is 426Mb, with 166Mb in a sub-folder called Options. 165Mb of this is in another sub-folder called Cabs, which in turn has other nested folders.

Could you tell me if it's safe to delete these folders?

DERRICK LEWIS

a *It sounds very much as if the Cabs sub-folder contains the Windows installation (.CAB) files: you can verify this by comparing the contents with that of the Windows 98 folder on the CD-ROM. As you have the Windows 98 CD-ROM, you don't need these copies on your hard disk and can safely delete them.*

Q Whenever I install new programs on my PC, the name of the store manager and company where I bought my PC come up as defaults in the installation dialogue box that asks for my Username and Company. Could you tell me how I can change these defaults?

DERRICK LEWIS

a *You need to change some registry settings, so back this up first. Then run Regedit and go to Regedit and go to HKEY_LOCAL_ MACHINE\ SOFTWARE\ Microsoft\ Windows\ CurrentVersion. The keys you want are in the right-hand pane. Look for RegisteredOwner and RegisteredOrganisation: you can double- click on either to change it.*

Q I still can't get Windows to remember my dial-up networking password, despite following your suggestions in June 1998's *PCW* and downloading and installing the appropriate upgrades.
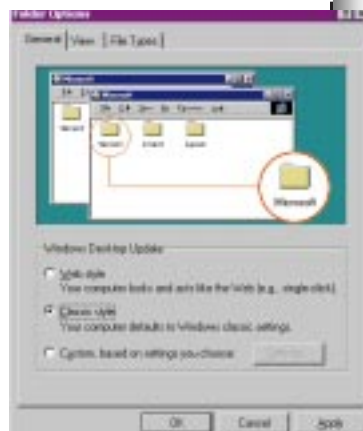
CLIVE BRITTEN

a *This can be due to a problem with the encrypted password file that Windows maintains. First, make sure you have a written*

record of all the passwords you use. Then delete the file username.pwl. You'll find this in your Windows folder, with username being what Windows knows you by. Next time you enter a password, it should then be remembered.

Q I installed some BT Internet software and it has changed both my desktop and the appearance of Windows Explorer — in my opinion, for the worse. How can I get back to the standard Windows 'look and feel' without uninstalling the software?

JANE TELFORD

a *Under the Start menu, Settings item you'll see some new choices. If you click on the Folder Options, you'll*

▲ TRADITIONAL ELEGANCE FOR THOSE THAT ESCHEW THE ACTIVE DESKTOP

see three options in the General tab. Choosing Classic style will restore the Windows 95 look we know and love. You may also need to untick View as Web Page from Start, Settings, Active Desktop, and right-click, then Refresh on the Desktop itself.

PCW CONTACTS