Brian Clegg is encouraged to look at alternatives to BT by readers' tales of woe.

DACS life

A while ago I commented on the careless attitude to viruses that has made them endemic in some companies. This seems particularly true of macro viruses. Where a virus that occupies an executable program seems dark and malicious, the fact that a macro virus is just a few instructions accompanying a document seems to make them less frightening. A combination of this and the way documents are emailed around (generally a good thing) makes macro viruses difficult to kill off. What I do find irritating, though, is the 'it's not my problem' attitude that many people seem to have. This week I got a Word document from the marketing arm of a large US web company. It had a virus. I replied immediately, telling them about it — I even told them what the virus was. And they ignored my reply. A timely reminder to make sure your virus checker is up to date — this particular virus was first spotted in August 1998 — and that macros in documents are disabled by default.

☛ **An update now** on the telephone connections saga. After my column a couple of months ago relating my problems with a DACS (the line splitter box BT sometimes uses to provide extra lines), I have had stacks of email from DACS sufferers. The worst case was a poor soul who was quoted an incredible £48,000 to have an ISDN line instead. One reader did find a solution accidentally. BT said they couldn't do anything about his DACS problem, but could give him Home Highway. He agreed to go ahead. The first step was to replace the DACS with two conventional lines. His line speed increased dramatically, so he cancelled Home Highway. Exit BT in a huff.

I spoke to BT, who said that since late last year they have asked what you want a second line for. If you intend heavy internet usage, they recommend Highway or ISDN-2; otherwise an ordinary line will suffice. This would be fine if they also explained the position if they have to fit a DACS (BT say they only use a DACS where existing capacity is limited). They don't mention it, apparently, because they don't want to overburden you with technical jargon. And they aren't going to start. Because despite my experience and that of a good number of correspondents, despite what BT's own fault

reporting line told me, the official BT story is that DACS 'behaves exactly like an existing second line'. They say there are many reasons why line speed may vary, and that a DACS should not make your connection speed any different to having a dedicated second line. It looks like it was a coincidence that my line speed nearly doubled when the DACS was removed, along with that of the gentleman I mentioned earlier. Perhaps part of BT's reluctance to admit that the DACS makes a difference is that they don't like to admit how good ordinary line speeds can be. The BT spokesman said that a DACS will normally support 24K to 28K. By implication, this is all they expect from a normal line. It seems a lot of us are just plain lucky.

☛ **Apologies from Cable & Wireless** for the unavailability of their cheap phone calls web site www.business-made-simpler.co.uk for a good while after my last column appeared. It should be up now: if there are problems, use the main Cable & Wireless site, www.cwcom.co.uk. A reader has pointed out an alternative cheap service, Euphony, which gives free local calls with one of its packages (sadly not to the 0845

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numbers used to get onto the internet, which aren't technically local). See www.euphony.com for details. There are other alternative providers out there too, but you have to shop around.

One final thought for anyone living near Reading who is plagued by DACS and doesn't fancy ISDN. Tele2 offer direct connection to the internet via a radio link, starting at around £65 per month. This sounds expensive, but compares pretty well with ISDN when you bear in mind that it gives you a 128K connection 24 hours a day. There are limits on the amount downloaded before you pay more, but it's an interesting concept that should be more widely available soon. See www.tele2.co.uk for more details.

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