



Softwords

A&L Computer Software Limited

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The Future Is Now

NETWORKING

This has been a term that many use for a variety of reasons. Whether it's making new contacts as friends, support groups, hobbies or for work, the idea is to have a support or an access mechanism in place to share information.

The term 'networking' is also used in the field of computers. Networking computers can allow you to share information to and from your co-workers' computers so that information is synchronized without duplicating efforts. By networking computers, you can also have access to each other's files without having to get up out of your chair.

To network computers effectively, there are several steps that must be taken. This discussion will focus on the operating system. Ever since Microsoft created Windows, the operating system could be used for small, light duty networking. It also allows the workstations the 'engine' with which to identify and communicate with the other computers.

Initially it was fairly basic (as compared to networking with operating systems of today), and easy to get up and running. If it 'crashed,' technicians could easily reinstall the entire operating system with minimal time (again, compared to networking today).

The operating system also didn't have the demands for Random Access Memory (RAM) as do its contemporaries. Remember, more RAM is always a good thing. However, that doesn't mean that it was all peaches and cream.

As demands on the computer increased along with the number of workstations, the harder the computer and the operating system had to work. This contributed to increased access, reading and writing times. 'Hanging' or 'freezing' may have occurred more often as well, as the operating system struggled to do what was necessary. When this occurred, the entire computer had to be shut down.

With the more recent Windows operating systems (2000 and XP), separate memory space is given to any launched applications. Subsequently, when a particular program has problems, Windows is able to shut down the individual program without disrupting other open programs or necessitating re-booting the computer.

It has created a much more stable platform with which to be networking than was offered in previous versions.

Windows 2000 and XP have created security features that offer more resistance to unauthorized users whether that be from within the local hard drive, local area network (LAN), or from intruders who might try to access from wireless networks, or via the Internet. With computers using Windows, 95, 98 or ME, upon start up, you could have simply pressed the ESC key and the computer would start up and into your Windows Desktop. User preferences could be used to lock out some features within Windows, such as the DOS prompt, Windows Explorer and other areas where an unexpected user might delete files within your local drive. Although you could have user preferences with each log in name giving you access to different programs, the security is not such where you can keep intruders out with confidence. With the newer versions of Windows, upon start up, you can have it require a username and password to proceed even on a stand alone set up.

Microsoft is constantly improving and covering off troublesome areas. This can include network problems found by developers and users who write to Microsoft. Subsequently, if possible within the operating system, Microsoft makes 'patches' available for upgrades. Its quite easy to get but you must have access to the Internet, to download these patches. This in itself creates other issues. Please read our article in this editions newsletter called, "Security Concerns."

The Importance Of Administration In Your Practice

By Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A.

This is one of a series of articles by Don Price on Practice Management which have been appearing in recent issues of **Softwords**. Don Price, B.Sc., M.B.A., is a Practice Management Consultant based in Ottawa, Ontario. He travels extensively throughout Canada helping physicians and their staff tune up and revitalize their offices through consultations and seminars. In addition, Mr. Price publishes workbooks and two bi-monthly newsletters for physicians and medical office staff. He can be reached at 1-800-458-1900 or fax (888) 339-5975.



Many doctors shy away from the administration of their offices, preferring to leave it in the hands of an Office Manager or experienced office staff. In the worst cases, there is no one in the practice who is aware of the basic principles of managing a business, and these practices survive from crisis to crisis.

The most efficient offices need strong leadership, and this must come from the doctors. This doesn't mean that you need to be involved in every aspect of managing the practice, but it does mean that you must be involved and be capable of making decisions that will develop staff morale and enhance efficiency.

The most important rule in administering a practice is this: You must invest in your practice. You need to invest financially, of course, but also invest your time and energy so that you are working proactively with your staff and each other towards a common goal.

Consider the following points:

- Assess the direction in which you want your practice to go and develop an annual Business Plan that will outline the actions that you propose to take.
- Develop an Annual Budget that will allow you to spend wisely and keep the tangible aspects of your practice (the technology, staffing, etc.) in good shape.
- Share administrative responsibilities amongst all doctors within the group, and let your staff know whom to approach on specific issues. If you are in solo practice, you may want to delegate some of the administrative responsibilities to your spouse in an income splitting arrangement. Check with your accountant on how to do this.
- Schedule administrative time into each week so that you don't have to use up personal time. Or even worse, tackle crisis situations when you are meant to be seeing patients.
- Hold regular meetings to discuss administration of the practice. These meetings will allow you to stay on track with your Business Plan, and should prevent any crisis management by anticipating and dealing with problems.
- Listen to your staff. They probably know more than you do about what works and what doesn't work in the practice and, with encouragement from you, will often have many good ideas for improving efficiency.

Administration doesn't need to be time consuming, but it must

be done regularly. Those doctors who take their leadership role seriously will spend less money and energy running the practice than those whose involvement is limited.

(This article first appeared in *The Practice Manager*, a newsletter published by Don Price & Associates.)



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User's Corner Security Concerns

For A&L Medical System DOS Users

Those of you who have been using the A&L Medical System DOS version for over ten years may have noticed that when billing some patients you get a message that says "patient already billed." Don't worry. The transaction number is duplicating itself, which makes it look like the patient was already billed for that day. The transaction number is based on a simple formula. For example, a transaction number of T2B28001 has the following meaning:

The letter 'T' is the doctor's identification, usually the first letter of the doctor's surname. The '2' identifies the last digit of the current year. 'B' identifies the month of the service day (January is A, February is B, March is C etc.). '28' identifies the day of the month. Finally '001' identifies that this is the first claim created that day.

If you look at the formula carefully, you may notice that the same transaction number could also be the service date for February 28, 1992, or February 28, 1982. A purging of claims will be necessary to avoid this confusion. Be sure to call A&L support staff if you need help with a little spring-cleaning.

For A&L HERO* Users

A&L HERO* users have been able to transmit claims and received acknowledgments, using modems to complete the tasks. From time to time we receive phone calls stating that a certain file wasn't sent or received when it was thought that it had been done correctly. It could be that the connection was distorted and caused an irregularity to occur within the file.

In the majority of cases, the modem and fax are sharing the same telephone line. Using one while the other is in use will cause problems with the transmissions. With busy offices, disruptions of transmissions are starting to become more common.

To prevent this from happening, double check and announce to all staff to stay off the line to which the computer modem is connected. Also, after the transmission is complete, **CHECK with the "RAS Communications Log,"** to confirm that the file you intended plus anything else that has been sent or received has a status of **"Completed."**

This will help in preventing any shortfall to your cash flow. If for any reason you see that a file has **'Failed,'** to be transmitted correctly, be sure to call the A&L support team for assistance.

Canadian Physicians Web Site

Ever feel left out in the cyber world with no place to call your own? Well, your search is over! Canadian Physicians is a web site you can call your own. Links and access to Electronic Medical Libraries such as Stat!Ref, Medline (National Library of Medicine), Online Continuing Education calendars, Medical Supplies, discussion forums and much more.

www.canadianphysician.ca

Has your office installed High Speed Internet recently? Make sure you install a firewall to protect your Medical Records. Cyber-Internet hackers may be at your doorstep!

The use of the Internet is continuing to grow at an unprecedented pace. The need to be "wired" to the "net" has now become a requirement for students, educators, professionals and the everyday home user. With this in mind, the quest for high-speed downloading and quick browsing has fueled the popularity of 'high-speed' Internet connections.

Such services as 'Bell Sympatico High-speed Internet' or 'Rogers@Home Cable Internet access' are signing up large numbers of users who believe that the only difference between the regular dial-up and their new services is the speed in the connection. However, to the educated Internet user this is not the case.

In a previous article we mentioned the importance of keeping your computer secure against viruses that may infect your PC and cause undue harm to your hardware or software. Once high-speed or cable access connections are set up, surfing the Net will require a certain level of protection against individuals who want to hack into a user's system to steal important information, your identity, or 'just for the fun of it'.

If you have high-speed access or cable Internet access in your office, technically as long as your PC is on, you are connected. Now you may wonder exactly what this means. If a PC has not been properly protected and secured, with the right tools, an individual could hack into your computer. The damage from a virus or online vandal is not just "virtual", as in losing your data or identity. It could have an ultimate impact on your life. Such concerns are the reasons why PC users should load or use what are called 'firewalls'.

A firewall is a set of related programs or hardware that protects a PC or network from users from other networks. Essentially, a firewall controls access, or in layman's terms 'prevents unwarranted access to your PC or network, while still allowing you to get your job done'.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the word security has forever changed the lives of many of us who live in North America. Moreover, the talk is not only of physical terrorism, but also cyber-terrorism. The "new age" cyber-terrorists use searching tools that scan thousand of machines per hour looking for holes.

High-speed connected (or Broadband) victims are popular amongst those wishing to inflict harm on a large scale. When they uncover a hole on someone's PC or network, they can take over the computer and even use it as a staging locale for additional attacks. Despite the threats, a large number of PC users are still unprotected. Furthermore, many users still do not keep their machines up-to-date with the latest security patches and workarounds, do not run current anti-virus software, and

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do not apply vigilance when opening e-mail attachments.

Everyone should endeavor to guard his or her PC. There are various ways you can achieve this. There is software available from anti-virus companies that creates firewalls to protect your PC from hackers or outside intruders. In previous articles we also talked about hardware products called routers, which are devices that have many features, possibly including a built in firewall to protect your PC or network from outside attacks. You can also take simple steps to protect your system by educating yourself on the features included with your PC operating system.

One improvement that should help over time is the introduction of Windows XP. Microsoft has stepped into the security arena with the inclusion of it's own personal firewall feature. It is still left to be seen, how well this feature will work. The personal firewall feature in Windows XP provides a base level of protection. However, for people who want a higher level of flexibility and functionality, even Microsoft recommends third-party firewall protection.

Some other points to remember:

- Antivirus software works but must be kept up-to-date
- Keep your software up-to-date
- Do regular backups

Nothing can be totally secure, as there will always be individuals who are looking for ways to create new viruses and new ways of hacking into a users system. You can always consult and hire companies involved in network security services to lessen the threat. You can make your high-speed Internet connection a benefit or an "Achilles-heel" to your office PC or network.

The best advice is to keep your computer security up to date. President George W. Bush, during the U.S. campaign on terrorism, was quoted as saying 'We will never tire and we will not waver.' With the speed and pace at which technology moves today, the same must be applied to protecting your own PC or network.



Feature Entertainer:

"Amy Sky"

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