

What's in store next year?

2006 is shaping up to be an exciting, and expensive, year for computer users who want to keep up with the Jones'. As well as new versions of Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Office, it is likely that we will see an increase in the storage capacity of DVD discs. Currently, a DVD will store 4.7 gigabytes of data on a single layer disc or 9.4 GB on dual layer discs. A new format known as Blu-ray will increase the capacity to 25GB on a single layer disc or 50GB on a dual layer disc. Prices are not known yet. What's my New Year wish? Cheaper high speed Internet connections.

Internet jargon

Bandwidth

Refers to how quickly information travels to and from your computer. It's usually expressed in bits per second (bps), kilobits per second (Kbps), or megabits per second (Mbps). A JetStream connection has greater bandwidth than a dialup connection.

Broadband

A term that represents high-speed, high-capacity Internet and data connections. Broadband uses wide-bandwidth channels for sending and receiving large amounts of information. All JetStream, and other ISP's high speed Internet connections, are commonly referred to as broadband but, strictly speaking, only the most expensive service with a download speed of 2 MB/Second should be called broadband

Dial-up

Describes when a modem is used to connect to the Internet via the telephone network. It's the slowest — and cheapest — way to connect to the Internet.

ADSL

Stands for **asymmetric digital subscriber line**. ADSL is a technology that brings high-speed (or high-bandwidth) transfer of information over ordinary copper telephone lines. An ADSL line can carry both data and voice signals, and the data part of the line is continuously connected. So you can use your computer and your phone at the same time. In some other countries it's simply called DSL. Asymmetric means 'not symmetric' and means that the upload speed, out of your computer, is slower than the download speed from the Internet into your computer.

JetStream

This is the name given to Xtra's high speed Internet service. Other Internet providers use other names

Disconnecting from the Internet

In the last Bits & Bytes I commented on a problem of modems disconnecting from the telephone line before e-mail has been sent and received. Changing a setting in Outlook

Express will keep the modem on-line until you tell it to disconnect. However, this creates another problem. If you forget to disconnect you could be tying up your telephone line unnecessarily and, in some cases, incurring extra charges from your Internet provider.

There is another setting you can change to overcome this. It tells the modem to automatically disconnect if there has been no on-line activity for a specified time. This from Gail Dymond:

Disconnect if Idle....

In Windows Me, Go to **Dial Up Networking** in the **Control Panel** and double click your **ISP icon**. The **Connect** window will come up. Click on **Properties** and then the **Dialling** tab and change the settings to your liking.

For Windows XP:

Go to **Network Connections** in the **Control Panel** and double click your **ISP**. The **Connect** window will come up. Click on **Properties** and then the **Options** tab...

Don't make the time too short otherwise you might be disconnected during a download. If there is no other work being done on the computer, it may (but not necessarily) interpret a download as inactivity.

Malware

Malware or 'malicious software' is software that is designed to take over and/or damage a computer without the user's knowledge or approval.

It includes, but is not limited to:

- Viruses
- Adware - unwanted advertising that appears on your computer.
- Spyware - software that collects and sends information (such as browsing patterns in the more benign cases or credit card numbers in more malicious cases) about users or, more precisely, the results of their computer activity.
- Key loggers - software that copies a computer user's keystrokes to a file, which it may send to a security cracker (called a hacker by most people) at a later time. Often the keylogger will only "awaken" when a computer user connects to a secure website, such as a bank. It then logs the keystrokes, which may include account numbers, PINs and passwords, *before* they are encrypted by the secure website.
- Diallers - a program that either replaces the phone number in a modem's dial-up connection with a long-distance number, often out of the country, in order to run up phone charges on pay-per-dial numbers, or dials out at night to send keylogger or other information to a security cracker.

Malware can be installed on your computer from infected discs you receive from other people but it is more likely to come from the Internet.

There is a wide range of software available which claims to protect your computer from these nasties but tests have shown that none are 100% effective at capturing everything.

I hope to have more on this topic at a later date.

Academic price software

Next year we may not be entitled to UCOL ID cards so it would be a good idea, if you are thinking of buying software which qualifies for academic pricing, that you purchase it before your current card expires.

Can you get a virus when you preview your e-mail?

You will have noticed that when you have your email inbox open, the first few lines of the email show at the bottom of the inbox. Somebody asked me recently whether this is equivalent of opening the email, that is, can you get a virus from the email even though you haven't double clicked it? My reply was I wasn't sure (computerspeak for "I haven't the faintest idea.") however I have done some investigation and it appears that if you haven't got an efficient virus checker running it is possible to get a virus.

If you have doubts about your virus checker and want to turn this feature off:

If you are using Outlook Express:

- Open *Outlook Express*
- Click *View*
- Click *Layout*
- Remove check (by clicking) in the box marked *Show Preview Pane*

My best advice is to keep your Virus Checker up to date

- Dave Craven

Using the Menu Bar in MS Office (Word, Excel, Access etc etc) without your mouse.

Try this in a spare moment, if you are like me you will be hooked.

Look at your menu bar and decide which drop down menu you need to see. Press ALT and release it then press the underlined letter in the name of the drop down. For example pushing ALT and then F will open the File menu. Additionally you can select a second command by simply pressing the underlined letter of the command you want in the menu (no need to push ALT again) so ALT+F+V will open the Print Preview for you. Use the TAB or arrow keys to move along the Tool bar.

- Dave Craven

A helpdesk story

Technician: Right-click on your desktop. What can you see?

Client: Nothing

Technician: Okay, right-click again. What can you see now?

Client: Nothing

Technician: Okay, tell me what you have done so far.

Client: I wrote 'Click' on my desktop.

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