

Article Archive 2005

December 2005 - Find IT Trust IT

In today's 'Googled' world we are all used to the concept of 'Information Accessibility' and the fact that more information is now being made available to us. However, often the process of locating the definitive information is not actually as easy as it at first appears.

November 2005 - How green is IT?

I have always fondly believed that the use of IT has the potential to reduce the environmental impact of day to day business processes. There is no doubt that it gives us new communications options and should, in theory at least, reduce our need to travel and also the amount of paper we consume. Please note that I said in theory!

October 2005 - Where are all the women

I read an article this week that claimed that female representation in the IT industry in the UK has dropped from more than one quarter of the workforce in 1997 to barely one fifth by 2004. The article then went on to say that the lack of flexible working is the biggest of several reasons why women are shying away from a career in IT.

September 2005 - The semantic web - a muggles view

For some time now Internet pioneers such as Tim Berners-Lee the inventor of the World Wide Web and founder of technical standards guardians The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), have been working on the next generation of information sharing systems. They call this the Semantic Web, a system for capturing the underlying meaning of electronic data and thereby adding a whole new level of intelligence and order to the vast oceans of data sloshing around on the world's computer systems.

August 2005 - Buying your way to the top

Search engines are crucial to any business with an on-line presence, with recent statistics estimating that they now account for over 90% of all traffic referrals to websites. Not so long ago, to achieve an optimal position in search engine rankings for your business you would have to spend hours considering page optimization, meta-tag strategies, keywords and content relevancy. Today, if you are prepared to dig deep into your pockets, you can achieve a top ranking on a search engine with a lot less effort, using Pay Per Click advertising (PPC).

July 2005 - Where IT is at...

There is a lot of soul searching going on in the IT sector at the moment - the industry seems to be going through something of an identity crisis. One manifestation of this is a rather silly debate to try and determine which other, more established, industry it (IT) most resembles. There are various analogies: for example Larry Ellison the CEO of Oracle favours comparison with the automobile industry whilst Intel the computer chip manufacturer apparently prefers to think of it as roads and railways. Other commentators favour a comparison with electricity and point out that in the early part of last century many major companies in the US employed a vice president of electricity.

June 2005 - RFID - What's it all about?

RFID or Radio Frequency Identification consists of tags, readers and a range of applications which track, monitor and manage items, e.g. retail stock items, as they move between locations. RFID is a technology for identifying assets and enabling computer systems to identify objects and their attributes. Tags themselves contain a unique identification number or Electronic Product Code (EPC) and also potentially other useful information of interest to the organisation(s) interfacing with them. It is this later point which makes RFID different to the unique barcode number we are all used to. Many supporters believe that no technology since the Internet has held so much potential for businesses, consumers and governments.

May 2005 - Deus ex Machina

In the late 1980's I spent an entertaining but rather undistinguished spell as a post graduate student at a well regarded technical university in the UK, working on a project in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). At the time Artificial Intelligence was a hot topic in academic circles, the project I was working on was all about building systems which could emulate human experts to diagnose complex problems from a set of symptoms. The problem was that none of it worked very well in practice. At the time computers were fantastic at number crunching but they didn't have much common sense.

April 2005 - The Awkward Squad

One of the most interesting things about Information Technology is the way it creates new and often quite radical business models which can seriously inconvenience established business. There are numerous examples of this affecting different sectors of the economy with widely differing outcomes. If you are reading this article on a plane there is a better than fifty percent chance that you purchased your ticket on line, in fact you will have been incentivised to do so by the airline themselves. This is a phenomenon known as disintermediation or, if you don't happen to have purchased an MBA recently, cutting out the middle man. In effect the airline is sharing the travel agents commission with us and everyone (except perhaps the travel agent) is happy.

March 2005 - Growing Pains

It is easy to forget that for commercial purposes at least, the Internet has been with us for less than ten years. A child born in 1996 would now be in year 5, fairly fluent at reading and writing, but still struggling a bit with long division. During this time the net has gone from being the exclusive territory of geeks and science fiction writers, through the excesses of the dot com boom and bust, to emerge as an essential arena for business. In fact, it has become so much part of the mainstream that we tend to take it for granted. In a couple of years our year 5 pupil will be using dad's credit card to buy their coursework online as if it had always been done that way; whereas we all know that in my day cheating required far more ingenuity and was in fact part of the educational experience

February 2005 - Whodunnit?

Don't worry, I am not about to bore you with the classic 1970s 'whodunit' board game Cluedo, where all the family aspired to be budding detectives. The purpose of which was lost on me at the time, but through a series of rolls of the dice and reading of cards, you had to establish whether it was Colonel Mustard in the Library with the Candlestick, or Mrs Plum in the Dining Room with the Knife; but I am going to discuss something similarly boring (or is it?), security

January 2005 - Hitting the Road Again

One of the promises of the telecommunications revolution was a society in which we spend less time travelling, and more time communicating at a distance. The vision presented was of a world where commuting was replaced by computing, and meetings we held by videophone or by donning a virtual reality headset. Aspects of what was perceived as the lifestyle epitome have indeed been realized, but in practice there are many activities which we need, or choose, to carry out in person.