

Tips, Tricks and Advice from your local “IT Guru”

This month I want to talk to you about a whole host of things. I'll start with Windows 8. The more I use this operating system, the more I like it. I know there have been some negative comments in the technical press, but I am honestly quite impressed. Of course, as I said last month, it really comes into its own when running on a tablet (and I am still immensely enjoying mine), but even on a desktop computer or laptop I still find it a joy to use. To me, it finally feels as though it's arrived at the stage Apple's OSX was at a few years ago, where everything works the way that you expect it to, and it feels right. I'm sure it's helped by the fact that even entry level systems are ridiculously powerful now, so most tasks are easily accomplished. But, even so, the OS feels mature now. It even breathes new life into older systems! I have installed it on a few aging PC's that were previously running Window Vista, even XP, and it has completely transformed them! Sure, you can't expect miracles, and you can't ignore the benefits of wiping a PC clean and starting again, but Windows 8 does seem to require less hardware for the same performance. Couple this with the fact that Microsoft has extended its period for discounts on upgrading, and it looks like a good move to update your operating system.

Now, I'll move on to smartphones. Last month was a big month for new hardware, with Samsung announcing the new Galaxy S4, HTC bringing out the HTC One, and Blackberry finally making the z10 available. All these phones are state of the art devices, each offering crazy amounts of power in a tiny package. Well, not so tiny as it turns out! The Samsung has a 5 inch screen, the HTC a 4.7, and the Blackberry a miniscule by comparison 4.2 inches. These things have as much power as a desktop PC did a few years ago, with the S4 sporting an 8-core 1.6Ghz processor and 2Gb of Ram! Having this much power means they can do some neat tricks, such as taking a video at the same time as a still picture and allowing you to pick the best frame from the video to use as a still. Or, you can take a burst of shots, even before you press the shutter button, so you never miss the perfect picture. For those who don't want to carry around a phone the size of a small paperback, or don't want to splash out the £450+ that these devices will be selling for, Nokia have released a couple of Windows Phone 8 devices that make much more sense. The Lumia 520 is a bargain, likely to be priced lower than my current favourite: the incredibly cheap Lumia 620, which is currently at £129 for a PAYG version. Most importantly, it offers everything a new smartphone user could want in a nice compact package. The Lumia 720 is a step up, with a better camera, slightly bigger screen, and more storage, but for this you'll likely be paying £100 more. Both devices come with the latest Windows Phone 8 operating system which, despite what you may have heard, is a very nice OS to use and has some distinct advantages over the opposition. OK, so it doesn't have the 750,000 apps that Apple or Android does, but it has the major things covered and I have yet to find anything major that's missing.

Finally, on a slightly obscure note, anyone running a business and doing payroll should be aware that from April you have to submit your weekly or monthly payroll details to HMRC via the Internet. I'm sure the government have good reasons for this, but it is going to mean a lot of people who have never had to use a computer before struggling to use a computerised payroll system. Having just looked into this, I suggest that if this affects you then you should take some time to make sure you have everything in place. This includes the correct software, a valid login to HMRC's web site, all of the relevant details for your employees and tax office, as well as a suitable computer for the task.

If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in this column, email me at look@4-11consultants.co.uk

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