IT Corner – December 2004

And So It Goes…

And so it comes to pass that this is the last IT Corner I will be submitting during my time in The Gambia. Three years is a long time and I must now move on. I hope to be able to submit articles from the UK after I return with topics of interest to volunteers in The Gambia (as per normal, just let me know if you want me to talk about anything in particular).

Previous IT Corner Articles

I thought that readers might be interested to have a list of previous articles published in this section so if they were interested in something in particular…

Keeping Your Computer Running Effectively

- Updating Microsoft Windows – August 2004
- Protecting Your Computer – August 2004 (free anti-virus software and other programs for your computer)
- Virus Scanning - November 2003
- Computer Equipment Protection – July 2003
- UPS Fun - April 2004
- To Back-Up or not to Back-Up: There IS no Question - November 2003
- Windows XP Updates - August 2004

Internet Access

- Internet Access (in The Gambia) - December 2002
- Internet Service Provider Clarification - March 2003
- Free Web Sites - December 2002 (where to get free web space on the Internet for your own web site)
- Fast Internet in The Gambia – August 2004

Fixing Problems

- "If all Else Fails…" - November 2003 (knowing when to give up…)
- Death of a Laptop - December 2002
- Rebirth of a Laptop ("Death of a Laptop, Part 2") - March 2003

Professional and Volunteer Material

- Training Material - December 2002
- Free and Open Source Software - April 2004
- "Volunteers in Gambia" Web Group - March 2003

Miscellaneous Topics

- File Transfer: The Death of the Floppy Disk? - April 2004
- DVDs - December 2002
- Piracy Rant – July 2003

All of these articles are available either from the VSO office (ask Yandeh nicely…) or from my web site at http://www.stevedrice.net/computer/itcorner

One Last Rant

I wanted to just say a few words about the donation of ICT equipment (read: computers) to The Gambia. Many people from the "developed world" seem to be under the impression that computers will solve the problems of the "developing world" and that they will bless us by sending us their old, perhaps not even functioning, computer equipment. Dumping a load of computers in The Gambia with no provision for training, technical support, maintenance, (least of all) power, etc is, in my opinion, worse than doing nothing and, frankly, an insult.

I always find it aggravating when I am asked if we should accept some old pieces of junk donated by some "benefactor" in the UK installed with Windows 3.1 or, better yet, with no hard disk at all. What is that good for? I have been encouraging people in my office to say "no" along with developing some "Hardware and Software Standards" for any equipment acquired by the department (new or donated). Saying "no" is difficult for people here though since they are used to saying yes irregardless of whether or not they need something (witness some of the situations with donors supplying the same thing four or five times) but it does need to be said. Incidentally, the same goes for other "donations" as well – Sending 200 copies of a school textbook in Swedish? Laugh not, things like this happen all the time!

I think the "developed world" needs to treat people here in the "developing world" with a bit more respect. What about ASKING what people need before sending it to them? What about treating them like any other company? Just because we are in The Gambia does not mean we don't know what we need. I have a pile of junk in our offices that people have "donated" that is useless (as in, obsolete or simply not even working, what a waste of shipping and money!) that will have to be disposed of. It is certainly not helping the development of this country…

Ok, I am not naïve enough to think that older donated equipment might be of use to someone somewhere (particularly here in Africa), but my point is that donors ASK to find out what the real requirements are and think twice about sending non-functioning or terribly obsolete equipment. Is training someone how to use computer software 10-12 years out of date really going to prepare them to work in a business in a capital city? Try using Windows 3.1 for a few minutes and you will see how different it is from Windows 2000 or even Windows 95. You simply cannot take someone who is used to using the older software and expect them to be able to use some software written only a few years later.

I feel better now. Thanks for listening/reading.

On a final note:

Computers are NOT the solution -- PEOPLE are.
Computers are simply a tool.
They can be misused by people just like any other tool.
The trick is to use this tool correctly…

News

- Two of the documents I have prepared for use in the Department of State for Health and Social Welfare are now available in the resource centre: Computer Use Guidelines and Network Use Guidelines which provide basic information (with lots of pictures) for the topic indicated. Electronic versions available on request (or on our web site at http://www.dosh.gm/docs).
- Anyone notice the impressive new QuantumNet building on Kairaba Avenue? Mr. Kah (president of QuantumNet) has indicated he will be moving in shortly though the official ceremony should be in the near future.
- I have prepared a (computer) CD containing a presentation with lots of pictures of my recent trip to Mali (with Chris, Sue and Anne) which is free to anyone if they give me a blank disk (or contact me and we will arrange something). Note: It also has music, so make sure you turn up the volume on your computer when you use it!

- Internet access was basically unavailable for the second last week of November. According to my sources the microwave receiver in Dakar was not working and needed to be repaired so all of The Gambia was being served by the TeleGlobe Canada Internet connection (satellite).
- The "Steve Rice Computer Fix-It Service" is now closed for business. Steve would like to thank previous clients for their many meals and hopes to be able to business with them again in the future. Opening soon "Steve Rice Computer Fix-It Service - London Branch" (rates may be significantly altered).

As per normal, let me know if there bare any topics you would like me to discuss/address in future columns.

Steve Rice
steve@stevedrice.net
http://www.stevedrice.net