

BYTES & PIECES

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER OF THE HOBART COMPUTER USERS GROUP INC.

Volume 2 - Number 19

7 February 2004

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NEW PLANS

The Management Committee deliberated long and hard the other night to come up with exciting new plans to get the Group moving forward again and those plans will be presented on Tuesday, 10 February 2004 at the New Town Senior Citizens Centre. This will be the last meeting at which Cindy Campbell will preside, so this is your opportunity to thank her for a job well done.

Has the Committee included what you want? Are there other ideas they should consider? Who will be the new President? Come along and have your input and let's get this show back on the road.

MICROSOFT PATCHES INTERNET EXPLORER

After some delay Microsoft has finally issued a patch for the vulnerability in its Internet Explorer that allowed hackers to "spoof" the URL shown. The flaw has been public knowledge for some time, but Microsoft failed to include a fix for it with January's scheduled patch releases.

The vulnerability has to do with the way IE parses URLs, specifically those that contain special characters. Using this weakness, an attacker can create a link that looks like it will send a user to a legitimate site, such as <http://www.microsoft.com>. However, once the user clicks on the link, the attacker can cause content from another site to appear in the window.

Microsoft typically releases security fixes on the second Tuesday of each month. But the seriousness of this vulnerability caused the company to publish this patch out of cycle.

The company also released patches for two other flaws in IE Monday. One of the vulnerability is in the cross-domain security model in IE, which is supposed to keep windows in different domains from sharing data. But this weakness allows an attacker to run scripts on remote machines if he can force the user to visit a malicious Web site or open an HTML e-mail message.

The other weakness involves dynamic HTML operations and allows an attacker to save a file on a target user's machine. The file would not execute automatically. For more info: <http://tinyurl.com/2ek3t>.

To obtain these important fixes, run Windows Update and choose to install any updates relating to Internet Explorer. Bear in mind, too, that browsers like Crazy Browser, SlimBrowser, NeoPlanet and Avant are all powered by Internet Explorer and need the patch.

To avoid the problem altogether, try Opera, Mozilla or Mozilla Firebird. These are not based on Internet Explorer, but use the Opera and Gecko engines instead.

MARKETING THE GROUP

If there is one thing that we have learned in the last year or so, it is that we need to put together a complete package to revive the Group.

Marketing, as any good guru will tell you, is about a mix of factors, each of which interacts with the others. These are often divided into four “P’s” – Product (or service), Price (fees, subscriptions, levies and other charges), Placement (or Position – where your venue/shop is, what customers you are focusing on), and Promotion (advertising, free publicity, brochures, posters, radio, TV, free samples). The interactions can be demonstrated with an example.

Example

You choose to promote your inexpensive product, sourced from China, via an extensive TV campaign during the midday soaps:

This will push your price up to cover the TV promotion, limit your market to the (mainly) women who watch at that time of day and require a mail-order fulfilment house to deliver the item to customers.

Now consider how you could market the same product to computer users. You could choose to advertise in computer magazines and sell direct, you could sell in bulk to people who run stalls at computer markets, or you could send sales representatives out around the computer shops. You might even consider doing all of those.

Your price will change to reflect the costs of promoting the item, whether the sales are in bulk to distributors and stall holders, commission for the sales reps etc. Your placement in the marketplace will change depending on which promotional avenue(s) you choose.

Application

Applying this to the Group’s future, I think we need to decide what we are offering and to whom. This will, because of the interactions between elements of the marketing mix, help us choose which is (are) the most suitable venue(s), how we can best promote our meetings, and determine how much we need to charge.

How it works

If we decided, for example, to provide hands-on email and internet courses for beginners, the venue (s) used would need to have a number of computers available with internet access(Online Access Centres, Nexus Games and Training, Adult Education, Derwent Regional Library, schools).

If we don’t have the expertise to prepare a suitable course ourselves and hire a professional to write/conduct the course, our price would have to cover the expert’s fees. Course preparation could be spread over however many courses we expected to conduct, while any other charges would have to be covered by the individual course fee. Such charges would include lecturer/tutor payment, venue rental (if any), printing of course materials, and provision of morning/afternoon tea.

If we choose to operate from a single, central venue, which does not have multiple computers, we would not be able to offer such courses and would have to continue with the “speaker out the front, audience asleep in the chairs” format, unless we find ways to improve and enliven the presentations with, say, more interaction with the participants, greater social activity, printed handouts, follow-up articles in our newsletter, and/or relevant material on our website.

If we choose to only meet at night, we miss out on those elderly, or poor sighted people, who do not drive at night – yet these may well be the people who would be prepared to pay for a course.

If we only present material suitable for relatively experienced users, as many of our present members are, then beginners may not find the presentations understandable, let alone interesting. Yet beginners and people needing help are the ones who are flocking to Adult Education courses and attended Linking Tasmanian Seniors' seminars and ABS statistics show that seniors are the fastest growing group of new computer users.

If we only cater only for beginners, experienced members that are not prepared to help the beginners will drift away, as may the beginners after they have learned the answer to their problems. To survive we would need to run continuous recruiting campaigns, possibly paying for advertising and reflecting the cost in our membership fee.

If we find innovative ways to increase awareness of our existence, more people will attend our presentations. Depending on who we reach with those promotions, we may need to alter what subjects we present lectures/seminars/tutorials/demonstrations on. In turn this may mean we need to do some of these things at centres with several computers available, which, in turn, may need a higher entrance fee – changing one element of the marketing mix leading to changes in other elements.

I think those examples should be sufficient to demonstrate that we have to consider all aspects at the same time and not just focus on, say, having a central venue. It also looks as if we may need to offer a variety of services to cater for people of different levels of experience.

My purpose in writing this article is not to suggest a final marketing mix, or the way forward for the Group, but rather to show the importance of developing a complete package, so that we know what we are offering to whom, at what price, and how we are going to promote it. We may also need to consider how we structure our prices (e.g. all inclusive membership fee, or user pays).

Once we have done all that, we will need volunteers to help us implement the package.

Will you be one of them, or are you going to leave it all to the Management Committee and then complain when the Group continues to shrink?

GOOD BUY

If you are running short of hard drive space, now would be a good time to add a bigger hard drive. 120 GB drives are selling for around \$165, 80 GB at \$125 and 40 GB at \$95. You could also replace that decrepit old 14 inch monitor with a shiny new 17 inch for around \$170. And instead of that CD burner you have been promising yourself, how about a DVD player/CD burner for around \$100! Contact Peter Campbell if you are interested.

Want a Pentium 233 for a modest price? How about a Hewlett Packard 670C DeskJet, or a Canon scanner? Contact Peter Campbell for further details.

And don't forget the ink cartridges available from <http://www.intelligentink.com>. Quality ink cartridges with smart chip, where applicable, at prices that are hard to beat.

Produced with: OpenOffice.org 1.1. **Last changed:** 7 Feb 2004

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