



Series 4 – How Do I Access the Internet?

Welcome back to a series of computer related articles brought to you by VistaSol Computer Solutions. Over the coming weeks we are going to be featuring articles based on the theme of 'How do I . . .?'

This week we are starting a new series of articles on the subject of 'How Do I Access the Internet':

Part 1 – Where Do I Start?

Perhaps we should start at the very beginning. The Internet, or the World Wide Web (WWW) (as it was originally known) is actually a BRITISH invention – yes, that's right, it's one of the few computing innovations that we can proudly stake a claim to. The concept of the World Wide Web was invented in March 1989 by Sir Tim Berners-Lee (born 1955 in the South West), and implemented in 1990. At that time, the "internet" was used almost exclusively by defence organisations and academic institutions, and communication was entirely text-based.

What we had then was simply a means of sharing information contained in basic text documents – how things have changed. In just twenty years this concept has evolved into the internet as we know it today. This evolution has allowed us to share information in whatever form we care to – from documents to photos, audio files, videos, program files etc. We can even chat to each other 'face to face' – thanks very much Sir Tim!

Twenty years on, and so much is now taken for granted; we start up our computers, access our emails, have a quick look at what's happening on facebook, check the weather forecast, read our favourite on-line newspaper, and then go about our daily routines. But, have you ever asked yourself "Am I using the right tools for the job, and how safe am I"?

Browsing the Internet

In order to access information on the internet, we use something called a 'Browser'. For most people this takes the form of 'Internet Explorer' (IE). IE is used by the majority of people simply because it has always been there on your Windows desktop. This is a very clever ploy by Microsoft to get everyone using their Browser and was introduced into the Operating System as early as Windows 98. You need to be aware however, that there are other alternative 'browsers' available. These

alternatives are faster, and more efficient, but more importantly, provide you with better security when accessing the internet. If you ask any technical savvy professional 'Which browser do you use', their answers will vary, but what will be constant, is that in all cases, **none** of them will say Internet Explorer.

There are a number of reasons why you should not be using Internet Explorer, but the most important is that of security. Internet Explorer has always suffered with vulnerabilities which are exploited by malicious individuals whose sole intention is to use Internet Explorer as a vehicle for delivering nasty surprises to your computer. These nasty surprise packages can take many forms, but most commonly, take the form of Malware (viruses), and tracking cookies. They can even make changes so that when you type in a web site's address; you are re-directed to some other web site (with less than savoury intentions). I could go on and on about the security issues with IE, but if you really want to know more on this subject, type "internet explorer" and "allow an attacker to execute commands" (with the quotes) into Google and you'll see what I mean.

The Alternatives



As I mentioned previously, there are a number of alternative browsers available, some of which have been around a lot longer than IE. Our particular favourite is 'Firefox' from the Mozilla organisation. Firefox can be downloaded from the Mozilla organisation's web site: <http://www.mozilla.org/>

When you install Firefox, you will be asked a few simple and straight forward questions, such as 'Do you want to import you settings from IE'. In most cases you should answer yes, except when it asks 'do you want to make Firefox your home page' – in this case, select the option to import your home page from IE (but don't worry because you can always change it later if you need to).

Using Firefox

When you start up Firefox for the first time, you will notice how much quicker it is to load your Home page. You should find that the interface is very similar to what you were used to with IE. There are a few exceptions; the most noticeable of which is that 'Favourites' are called 'Bookmarks' in Firefox, but other than that everything else should appear very familiar to you. The most important differences occur 'under the bonnet' and will provide you with a much more secure and reliable experience while browsing the internet. More about this next week . . .

That's about all I've got space for in this article, but over the coming weeks we'll investigate Firefox further and discover how to get the most from your new Browser.