

The Aspect Diary



Both clients & suppliers regularly tell Nikki & I that we sound identical when we answer the phone. News to us, being as one of us is Welsh & one Scottish, but then there's only so much you can do with "Good morning, Aspect". Or is there? Because it occurs to us that while Nikki always answers "Good morning/afternoon, Aspect", I always answer with "Aspect, good morning/afternoon". See? Simple.

We know companies always lament "you just can't get the staff these days", but some of the account 'management' we're treated to by our suppliers beggars belief. We had a quote for a product recently, but the price on an optional extra we'd asked for was missing. So we immediately sent back - "thanks, but how much is <the option>?", to which the reply came straight back, "which product is that for?" Oooh, I dunno, how about THE ONE YOU JUST QUOTED IN THIS EMAIL THREAD??? Yeesh. It's like *Finding Dory*.

Continuing on the theme, we were trying to obtain some server parts without much luck & were given details for a global procurement company. Rang the toll-free UK number & after 10 minutes of fairly fruitless chat, I was asked if I wanted the UK number. Sigh. Encouragingly, they also offered me an email address "in case they don't answer". Well they did answer. But possibly I woke them up. Taking an actual call seemed to astound the man I spoke to. He suggested a colleague might be able to help, but he couldn't find him. He said he'd "try" to pass on a message & that he "might" get back to me. I asked if I could email & he said I could try, but didn't sound convinced anyone would read it. So I emailed the people who may not bother to look at it & cc'd the people who thought the UK division might not answer the phone. Every day, a new circle of Hell.

We're great believers in accuracy, but it can be carried too far. We had a memo from a supplier on the last day of Feb to say they'd undercharged us for services & would be sending an additional invoice. And they did. For 2p. Considering the original invoice was just shy of £1100, you'd think they could've let it go ...

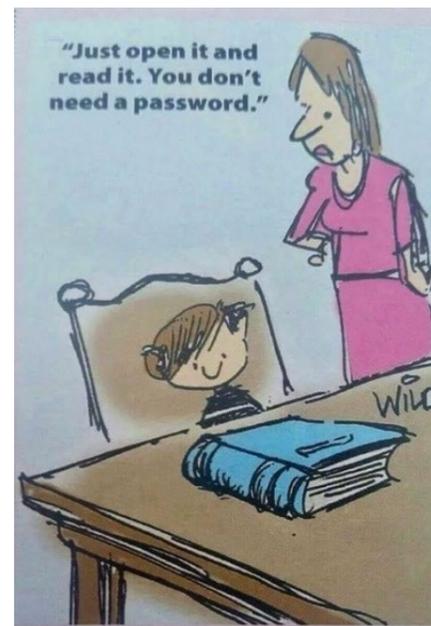
Speaking of ridiculousness ... has anyone else received the 20-page questionnaire from the Statistics Office checking your annual expenditure on items like uranium, water taxis & spacecraft? Rounded to the nearest £1000. So many pages, so very many zeroes. Your taxes at work.

Well that's it for this issue. Hey, you never know - by next time we might finally know where we are on Brexit. Or not

I'd like to dedicate this issue to my wonderful dad, who sadly passed away a few days before Christmas. Though he didn't profess to understand very much of what went in the newsletter, he was always one of its biggest fans. Or maybe just mine.



The Last Laugh



The Aspect Newsletter

Issue 42 - Spring 2019



Eggs-tra! Eggs-tra!

Read all about it!!

Welcome (albeit belatedly) to 2019. Obviously 2018 wasn't the best for us on a personal level, so here's wishing for a happier year this year.

One theme from last year that we're banging on about again inside is the reminder that Windows 7 is nearing end-of-life. Yeah, yeah, we know you know. But while we don't believe anyone's put the theory to the test, we find ourselves wondering if *not* upgrading might have repercussions for your GDPR compliance??

Aren't we jolly little (Easter) bunnies?

Our quiz this time was going to be James Bond-themed, as there was meant to have been a new film out this year. But now there isn't. So we've brought forward the quiz we'd intended for summer (you may wonder how far ahead we compile these things, but don't. You'll only depress yourselves. Suffice to say, yes, next Christmas is done). For this issue, knock yourselves out on our telly SciFi quiz.

Happy reading. ☺

.. 18, 19, 20.. Ready or not, here I come! ... uhhh why can't I smell chocolate anymore? Hello?? Bear??



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Aspect BC FAQs

What is the funny key either side of the space bar with the four squares on it?

If it was in colour, you'd know straight away. It's the **Windows** key, and you can use it as a shortcut to other commands. For example:
Windows key + L will lock your PC.
Windows + R brings up the Run command box.
Windows + E opens File Explorer.



Hmmm. What other keyboard shortcuts are there?

More than you can shake a stick at. If your mouse wasn't working for some reason, **Ctrl + Esc** does the same as clicking on Start. If you want to print something and there doesn't appear to be a Print button anywhere, **Ctrl + P** will do the trick. **Ctrl + C** will copy, and **Ctrl + V** will paste (because of course P is already taken). **Ctrl + S** will save. In fact, you can just about get by without a mouse if you're absolutely stuck.

On the flip side though, because there are so many shortcuts using **Shift**, **Alt** or **Ctrl**, all it needs is for you to accidentally bump one (or more) of them as you type, and you can find new windows opening, paragraphs re-aligning themselves, even the Thesaurus popping up. You wouldn't think, for example, that **Ctrl + Shift + Y** is something it'd be easy to accidentally do (sort of the equivalent of playing Twister on the keyboard) and yet the number of people who manage to turn on the display of formatting marks (eg. ¶), which is what that key combination does, is amazing.

My password isn't working. I'm sure I'm typing it correctly, but of course all I see is asterisks.

Sometimes you get the option to display the password you're typing, but if not, make a note of what's in the **username** box so you can put it back in later, then delete it and type what you believe to be your password there, so you can see it. A common problem is that you have a number in your password but you're using the numeric keypad without the Num Lock turned on, in which case the number won't appear. Or maybe you simply have a dodgy or stuck key. Hopefully once you can see your password, you'll get an idea of what's wrong.



We'd love to hear your comments and feedback.

Just email:

newsletter@aspectbc.co.uk

(Recent issues are on the website if you missed them).

If in doubt ... preview

If you're using our email filtering service, then it's worth reminding you that when you get your daily Digest reports, you do have the option to **Preview** emails that have been quarantined. It's a safe way to give them a quick once over before releasing them.

If we can also offer another word of advice? Yes, occasionally the filters do get it wrong and quarantine genuine emails. So you may see a sender's name you recognise, or the subject might say eg. "Order". But we'd say that you're safer to assume the filters have got it right. So don't just release it without thinking, no matter what it seems to be. Preview it. It's one extra click, a few seconds to look at it. Isn't that better than a scam landing in your mailbox?

Changes to VAT returns



MTD. Heard of it? No, it's not Match of the Day.

MTD stands for **Making Tax Digital** and means that for the next VAT quarter that lands fully after 1 April 2019, you can't just login to HMRC's website and type in your nine numbers. They have to be digitally submitted.

So what does that mean for you? Well, if your accounts software is via subscription, you should be fine, as it ought to be up to scratch. But if you own your software, ask the provider if your version is MTD compliant. Even versions from last year might not be. If you're not compliant, you have the choice of changing to something that is, or using some kind of bridging software to make the link between your accounts software and the HMRC website. There are some already out there, plus we know of another (a freebie, for the first year anyway) that's just been approved by HMRC.

Frankly, we reckon this whole change has been woefully under-reported. There have been adverts on commercial radio, and there is a one-liner on the VAT website, but it's not exactly arresting. True, a letter did finally land from HMRC themselves, but not till mid-February! Couldn't they have brought that shaggy blue monster out of retirement now that everyone knows about the workplace pension? He's not doing much these days.

After having dug to a depth of 10 feet last year, Canadian scientists found traces of copper wire dating back 200 years and came to the conclusion that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 150 years ago.

Not to be outdone by their neighbours, in the weeks that followed, an American archaeologist dug to a depth of 20 feet and shortly after, a story was published in the New York Times:

"American archaeologists, finding traces of 250-year old copper wire, have concluded that their ancestors already had an advanced high-tech communications network 50 years earlier than the Canadians."

One week later, the Welsh authorities reported the following:

"After digging as deep as 30 feet in North Wales, Dai Jones, a self-taught archaeologist, reported that he found absolutely nothing. Dai has therefore concluded that 250 years ago, Wales had already gone wireless."

Cymru am byth!



A guide to switching to a new Comms provider

If you intend to move your phone lines, phone calls or broadband to a new provider, there are a number of things you need to be knowing or asking yourself.

Am I in contract?

This is so, so important. If you're still under contract with your current provider, the penalties for leaving early and breaking that contract can be truly horrendous. Before you start the migration exercise, make very sure you're free to go.

Having said *that*...

When clients enquire about their telecoms contract status, it often happens that they're told they've already re-signed to a five year contract (it's *always* five years. God forbid you should be free to leave in less time than a fairly hefty prison sentence). But trust us when we say it's worth requesting a copy of what your company representative signed. And if they say there was no written document, just a voice recording, then ask to be sent the recording. Seriously. Get it, scrutinise it and make sure it stands up. It pains us to say it, being as we are in the telecoms industry, but not everyone is as transparent and genuine as we are.

How much notice do I need to give?

This varies from provider to provider, and while some of them may have really onerous terms, unless you can definitely prove that you didn't sign up to those terms, it's hard to argue the toss.

My new provider will tell my current provider I'm going, won't they? Isn't that 'giving them notice'?

You wish. No, that particular advisory is only to find out if your current provider is willing to release you. Typically, of course, they will, but not if you owe them monies that they've been trying to collect. But as far as formally giving notice goes, you're expected to give the requisite amount of notice to your current provider *yourself*. At the end of the notice period, you're then free to make arrangements to move away.

What if they try to close down the service before I've had a chance to move it?

Well yes, obviously what you don't want is to give notice and have your current provider cut you off when the notice period is up, so it's important when you put your notice in to state clearly that you are NOT giving notice of termination. You are giving notice that you will be migrating your service. You need to be very firm that the service should continue until such time as it's successfully migrated away. And yes, that does mean you'll have to pay them for any days/weeks that elapse between the end of the notice period and you escaping.

Can I expect any other fees?

Well, for broadband, the whole *freedom-to-switch-utilities* culture has meant that you shouldn't be charged for moving that service. For anything *else* ... we'd love to say that as long as you do everything by the book (as written by your current provider), you shouldn't incur any extras, but we know that some providers choose to write their book as a Gothic horror. All we can suggest is that you ask for a written statement from your provider of exactly what charges they will apply, and why. (*Why* is always a good one).



Jargon Buster #31 - What is a 'U' ?

Leaving aside the obvious (whereby it's the letter between T and V), we were actually referring to 'U' as a unit of measurement for eg. comms/server cabinets, rack-mount servers, switches and so on. A small wall cabinet, for example, might be 6U, while a full-size floor-standing one might be 42U.

But what, as we asked above, is a 'U'?

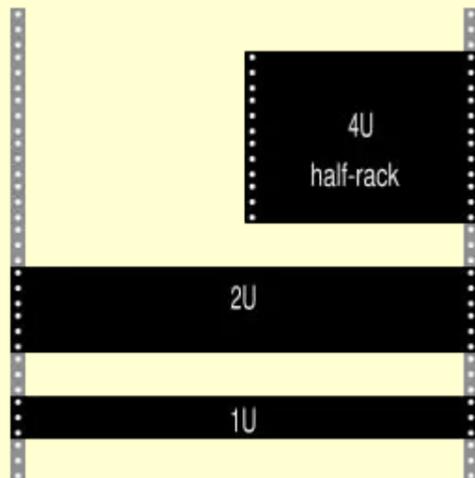
Well it's a unit of rack measurement, equivalent to 1.75 inches high (or 44.45mm). Switches are typically 1U, rack-mount servers are usually 1U or 2U, meaning they'd fit into a cabinet as shown (right).



Interestingly (and to be fair, we use that word in its absolute loosest sense), it is also equivalent to one *vershok*, which is an imperial unit of measurement from Russia, obsolete now.

Not a lot of people know that.

Even fewer care.



Windows 7 has to go. Start planning NOW.

As we've mentioned more than a few times lately, support for Windows 7 ceases in January 2020. Before you shrug that off, remember that little thing called GDPR? You're obliged to keep personal data secure. By law. And if you're still using Windows 7 after the deadline, you're operating with a major security vulnerability. If you suffered a data breach, you would have to prove that you had done everything possible to prevent it happening. It could be argued that if you were running an obsolete and unsupported operating system, you *haven't* done everything possible.



Why does it make you vulnerable? Because Microsoft won't be issuing any more security updates for Win7, a fact that the hackers and low-lives out there will exploit, in the same way as you saw them target Windows XP systems not so long ago, causing chaos in the NHS amongst other organisations.

If you've got a lot of Win7 machines, then this is obviously a major undertaking and possibly a major expense. Does it necessitate buying all new systems? Not necessarily. Some of your newer machines might upgrade happily to Windows 10 with the addition of some extra memory. But you need to start planning **NOW**. If you have bespoke systems that only run on Win7, then this is something you need to address as a matter of urgency. And it's not just Windows 7. If you have servers still running **Windows Server Standard 2008**, they need to be replaced too.

We'll happily discuss planning and strategies with you, so do give us a call. Sometime *before* 31 December would be nice



Big problem? Not on that screenshot.

A brief request, if we may?

If you operate two monitors and want to send us a screenshot of an issue, could you please just snip the actual bit with the error message and send it? You see, if you send us the shot of both screens, the error message looks like this, which is really impossible to read (yes, isn't it just?) and magnifying it often just turns it into a blurry blob.

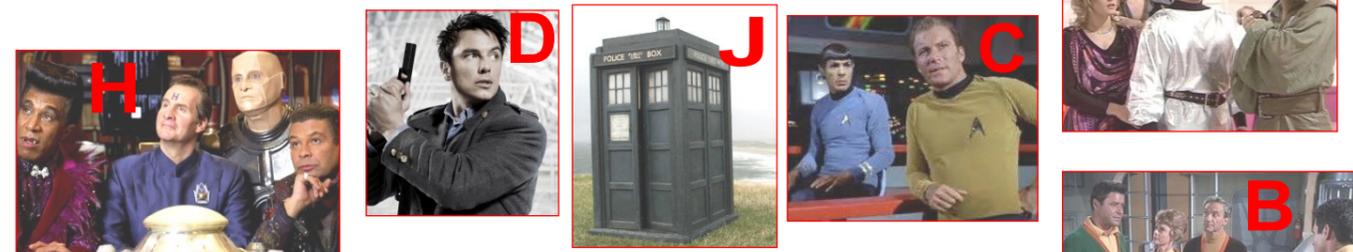
Spare a thought for our poor eyes.



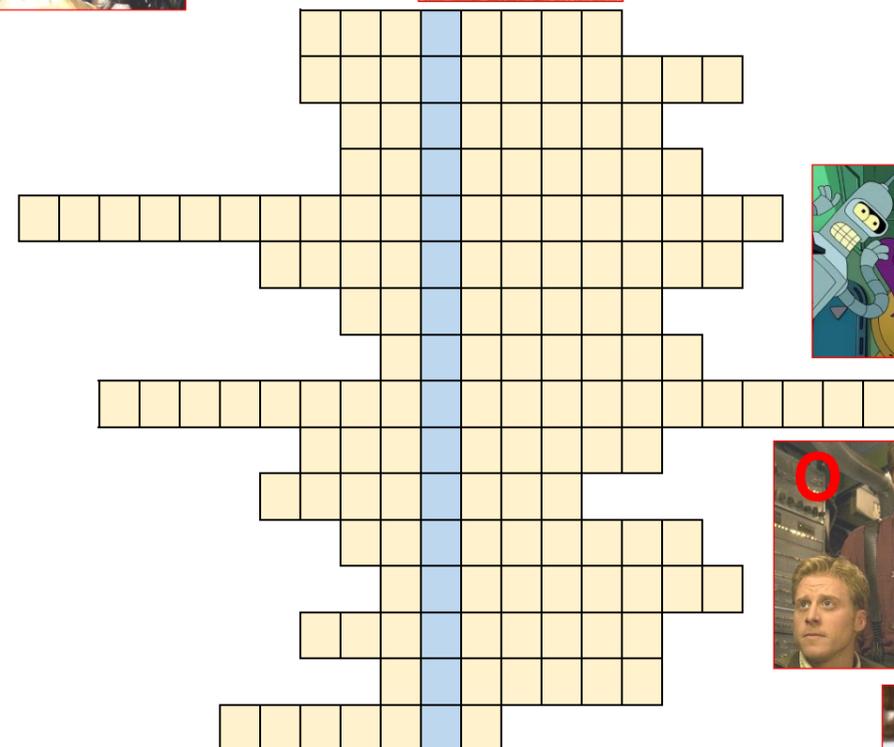
TV Sci-Fi series quiz!

While our quizzes are undoubtedly fun, we thought maybe there wasn't always sufficient tie-in with the technical aspect (excuse the pun) of the newsletter. So we've released our inner geek. Below are photos from various TV sci-fi and aliens series. Put the series titles in the grid, and the blue squares will spell out another sci-fi series. Oh, and where there are numbers in the titles, they will be entered as digits eg. *8* and not *e-i-g-h-t*. Once again, no delineating lines between words and the clues are strewn about with no regard for the grid order or your sanity.

Answers on the website - follow the link from the newsletter page.



A
B
C
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K
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P



Broadband price drops

Yes, we're delighted to be able to offer clients a reduction in their monthly broadband costs on standard ADSL and fibre broadband. Prices from our suppliers were reduced from 14 February and as a result, we can share the Valentine's Day love and help clients make some pretty significant savings. Who needs flowers and chocolates to say nice things?



The reduced pricing is available both to all new customers, and to anyone who is out of their minimum contractual term. We've already contacted all our clients who are out of contract, as they're free to take up the offer immediately. Everyone else will be contacted as they come out of contract and given the option of signing up again.

And if your broadband isn't currently with us, why not still see if we could save you money?

Alternatively, if the broadband speeds with you aren't that great, why not ask us for a quotation for a leased line? Lately, it's seemed like everyone has. We've had order upon order upon order. Never known a spell like it. In comparative terms, yes, it is still a lot more expensive than ordinary broadband or fibre, but if your internet links are critical to your business, it's becoming a much more viable proposition these days.

Vassilly's Blog

Wed 2 Jan

Ha-aaahhh-chooo!! ..ppy New Year ... cough... cough... cough.... loyal fans. Sniffle. Whimper. You are maybe notice that I am not a well 'kat. No? **COUGH! COUGH!!** Are you notice now? Thank you. Yes, I am being struck by big lurgy but I am turn up at Aspects today like good little soldier. Is still medicinal chocolate in office from before Christmas, see.

Thurs 3 Jan

Medicinal chocolates is gone, and so is lurgy. Who is need antibiomatics?

Fri 11 Jan

Boss men is look for volunteers to be going to cables job in Essex later in month. I am already make resolutions of not volunteering in 2019 so I am keep paw firmly down and I am also carefult to not make eye contact. But they is pick me anyway. Hmph. Apparently, job is somewhere past Gallows Corner but before Foulness Island.... Gulp. Is like *Treasure Island* meets TOWIE.

Wed 23 Jan

Who!! Icy!! I am fall over outside Aspects and bruise tail. I am tell Payrolls lady to make enterings in Accident Book. She is sigh and get it from drawer, along with special addendumdumdums (these is pages just for me. Is many of them). She is ask where I am being hurt. I am turn round to show her tail region, but she is hold up hand. She say where outside? Ah. I say I am walk behind cars next door when paws is go every which way. She say she is pleased, as this means is not Aspects problem, and she is pat me on head. I say is not head that is hurt, and I am go to show her bruising again, but she say she is not that pleased. On plus side, I am tell boss men that is not possible for me to be going to Essex on Monday, because tail is too sore to be sitting down all that way. IT Boss Man is start to argue, but Payrolls lady is whisper to him about 4 hours of whingeing 'kat, and he is change mind.

Wed 6 Feb

Payrolls lady say we are have visitor today who is ask "where is rat?" Apparently he is mean me!!! I am not rat! Rats is have fur, whiskers, long snout, small ears, long tail... we is not alike at all!!! I am so upset, I am have to eat two Kit-Kat.

Wed 13 Feb

Back to Red Ditch, with IT Boss Man this time. While we is drive, he say we are maybe be late home. I tell him I am maybe introduce him to idea of overtime. He say he is maybe introduce me to hard shoulder of M50. We is agree to say no more about it.

Tues 19 Feb

Now we is have job to plan in Newbury! Peoples, please! Have pity! Is you ever spend hours in car with IT Boss Man? No? Here is list of "Things that is annoy IT Boss Man in car":- slow drivers, hesitant drivers, drivers who is not use mirrors, drivers who is hog middle lane, drivers who is crawl past accidents, drivers who is not let you pull out.... actually, anybody who is drive car but is not him. I am give him list and he say I am forget one big annoyance in car. He is write 'Vassilly' at bottom of list.

Wed 13 Mar

Storm Gareth is blow mighty winds across Wales, but I am not there. Today is day I am off to Newbury with IT Boss Man. And I am worry for nothing peoples! Journey is very restful. OK, is because I am have snoozelet on back seat for 2 hours, but come on! He is pick me up at 6 o'clocks!!! I am raise question of overtimes again, but he is threaten to drop me out of window into cross-winds on Severn Bridge. I am like travel as much as next person, but not as small ballistic missile. So I am kip down and keep quiet.

Fri 15 Mar

As we are already have St David's Day this month, and now St Patrick's Day this weekend, Payrolls lady is wonder if there is patron saint of meerkats. I am explain we are have referendum for choosings between Alexiev (who is famous medieval dragon-slaying 'kat) or other 'kat. By narrow whisker, voters is choose other 'kat, maybe because Alexiev is not actually born in Meerkovo. But then they is realise they is forget to say on ballot exactly *which* other 'kat peoples is choosing, and is turn out that everyone is have different 'kat in mind. Payrolls lady is ask who is win in the end. I am say that is still not *quite* decided, but we is confident that decision is come soon. She is ask when referendumdum is happen ... Ummm June 1978.

She is seem quite depressed after we is have this little chat....



The Helpdesk of HORROR ...

And still they come



"I need help. My computer is dead. I've just got a black screen."
"What was it doing before it went black?"
"I was in Outlook, and it froze. I spoke to your colleague and he told me to press and hold the power button till the screen went black. I did that and now nothing is happening!"
"So... you didn't push the power button again to turn it back on?"
"He never said anything about that."

"Thank you for calling tech support, how can I help you?"
"When I try to change my password, I'm typing but it's just making stars."
"OK, that's normal. It's a security feature to prevent someone standing behind you from seeing what you're typing."
"But there's no-one standing behind me."

"Thank you for calling, how can I help you?"
"Hello?"
"Hello?"
"Hello?"
"Hello?"
"Hey, check this out! The machine says hello back when I say hello!"
"I'm not a machine, sir."
"OH, MY GOD! IT'S ADDRESSING ME!!!"
"Sir, I'm not a machine!"
"Oh. You're one of those human peoples?"
"Yes sir. I am a human peoples."

"Good afternoon, this is tech support. Can you give me your billing number please?"
"No, can you please tell me your billing number?"
"Sir, I'm not a computer, could you please stop pressing the buttons and *tell* me your billing number?"

"I want a credit on my internet service. It hasn't worked for the last two weeks."
"I'm sorry to hear that. Let me just check some things Hmm, I'm not seeing any break in service."
"Well I've been staying with my daughter and it's definitely not been working."

"Sorry, you're saying you haven't actually been at home?"
"What does that matter? I had my laptop with me."
"Yes, but the internet service goes to your house. You can't take it with you."
"You're wrong. I've used it in a hotel before."
"No, you were using the hotel's internet service, not your own."
"No. You're wrong."

"My laptop won't charge."
"Is it plugged in right now?"
"No. But if it was, it wouldn't charge."
"Well let's just try anyway."
"Dammit, it's charging!"
"OK, but if it gives you any more problems, just call."
"I'm not going to call you back! You're just going to make it work again!"

"Right, I'm connected to your PC now, so I'm going to install this printer for you."
"Thanks."
... a few minutes later ...
"There we are. OK, do you want to try printing something?"
"It's still not printing."
"Sorry, I'm still watching your screen - I didn't see you send anything to print."
"Oh, I'm on my other computer."

"I've got this error message on the screen..."
"And what does it say?"
"I dunno."
"Well if it isn't in old Mesopotamian or ancient Druid runes, can you *read* it to me?"

"OK, I need to get your IP address. Can you click Start, then Run, and in the box that you get, type IPCONFIG."
"OK."
"That will show you an IP address of 192 dot 168 dot 100 dot something. I need that last part."
... silence ...
"Sir? Are you still there?"
"Hold on."
"I just need the last part."
"I said hold on."
"Fine."
"OK ... one hundred and ninety-two billion, one hundred and sixty-eight million, one hundred and seventy-two thousand, two hundred and thirteen."
"I just needed the last part."
"Why didn't you say so?"
"I did. And by the way, those are dots, not commas."

"I can't get into my employee account. Could you reset my password for me please?"
"According to this, your account's been disabled. You'll need to get your line manager to put in the request."
"Oh. I'm not sure he'll do that."
"Sure he will. Why wouldn't he?"
"Because he sacked me last week."

"I bought some ink cartridges for my printer today and they won't fit. I'm very unimpressed with your company right now."
"I'm sorry to hear that. What model printer do you have, and which cartridges have you bought?"
... explains ...
"Ma'am, those are HP cartridges. You have an Epson printer."
"But the man in the shop said this was a common brand."
"Didn't you tell him what model printer you had?"
"No, I couldn't remember, so he showed me some common ones and I picked these."