

The Aspect Diary



We're pretty sure most of you will empathise with how weird it's been easing back into 'normal' working, particularly if you were furloughed at all, but even if you've just been working from home. It's bad enough that we've all lost several marbles while we've been isolated, but do you find you've forgotten how to do bits of your job? We certainly had fewer orders for eg. broadband during lockdown, so the first one we had to process left us a bit bewildered. Uhhh... how do we do this again???

(Can we say as well, when we say "just" working from home, we mean no disparagement. All of us at Aspect did it & we know it's most definitely still work. But if you also had to put up with comments from people who think you took an odd phone call & otherwise lolled about all day, then you have our sympathies.)

It really wasn't just us who struggled to get back to full mental capacity though. One of our software vendors sent us a licence renewal notification in June for one of our clients. Under 'client name' it said 'Ltd'. Well gee, that narrows it down, thanks. But even that wasn't as bad as the other licensing vendor who asked if we wanted to renew their service. Yes please, we said. Oh, they said, actually you can't - we don't do it anymore. Well why the bleepity-bleeping-bleep did you ask then?

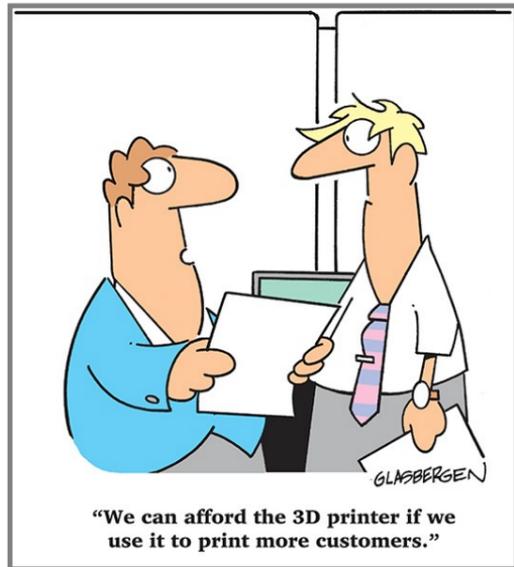
Frustrations continued with another supplier who brought out a brand new e-commerce website. Their old website had never been very searchable, so we were hopeful of improvements. Ummm. A search for a particular brand of laptop brought up a PC, a hard disk & a memory stick. But a search for a wireless access point found it straight away ... except the accompanying picture was of an insulated bottle carrier. (Pretty sure they don't even SELL insulated bottle carriers). As for network switches, one would imagine it'd be good to search on the type of technology, or the number of ports, yes? Nope. You can search by colour. Yep, colour. Well that is the single most important feature of a switch. Said nobody, ever.

We have new neighbours at Aspect, as Vassilly will have informed you. Oh yes, irony of ironies, since we'd decamped back to the office to escape the neighbour's DIY, we began July with Bang! Bang! Bang! Nyeeeeeee-yahhhhh!!!! Whheeeeep-duh-duh-duh- as the refit got underway. And what is it? A patisserie! Steve popped in very early on to offer our services. Not for ICT support. For cake tasting. No flies on us. (Unfortunately our unit & the one next door used to be one unit once upon a time & pipework used to run between. Most of it's gone now, but by 'eck the smell of cakes baking doesn't half filter into our building. It's torture!!)

And there, with the scent of vanilla in our nostrils, we leave you for another issue. We will return with our festive Xmas edition. Whether anyone else is permitted to be festive remains to be seen.

Take care everyone.

The Last Laugh



The Aspect Newsletter

Issue 48 - Autumn 2020



One never knows what these covers will look like when printed. On screen, this is like French Mustard. Does that say autumn to you? Excellent! We'll go with that then!

A very, very warm welcome back to the Aspect newsletter. We did do Spring and Summer editions (granted, Summer was a blink-and-you'll-miss-it job), but since we couldn't be entirely sure where you all were, we sent them by email instead of posting. Unfortunately we didn't have email addresses for some of you so you may have missed out. Both issues are on the website site though, if you've missed your Vassilly fix. You'll be glad to know he endured lockdown with his usual patience, kindness and good grace. In other words, pretty poorly all in all. Being as he doesn't take instruction well at the best of times, all the conflicting directives made his little head spin. And not just his. Should we go to the office or work from home? Eat out to help out, or stay in and keep our germs to ourselves? Refrain from seeing a bunch of friends and family at home, but pop along to mix with dozens of strangers down the pub? Utterly bewildering.

As a result of a fairly major (and nightmarish) project that we had going on during the summer, we spent a lot of time studying *how* you email, *what* you email and *who* you email. It's highlighted some practices that we think might bear having a spotlight shone on them, plus we want to explain why sometimes things go wrong. So this edition is shaping up to be The Email Special.

The humungous workload involved in the aforementioned project meant that we couldn't spend as long on the newsletter as we'd have liked, so there's a bit more humorous in-fill than usual. (You know, you really need to work harder on feigning disappointment).



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AspectBC FAQs

My emails have suddenly gone teeny-tiny. I can't believe nobody's complained because they must need a magnifying glass to read them.

Ah-ha. That's the clue right there - nobody's complained. Reason for that is they're not seeing what you're seeing. You've managed to Zoom out on your screen. When you're typing your email, click on **Format Text** from the top menu, and way over to the right on that ribbon bar is the **Zoom** option. You'll find you're not on 100% - set it back to that and you'll be fine.



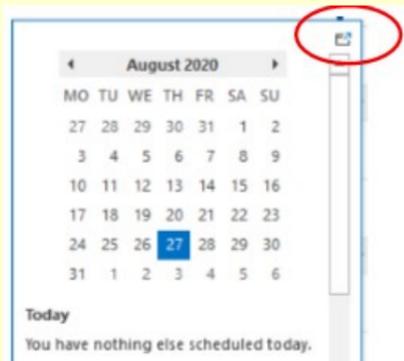
Why don't I get reminders about my Outlook calendar appointments?

They might be turned off. Go into your **Calendar**, and then choose **File -> Options -> Advanced** and make sure that **Show Reminders** is ticked.

You can also take a peek at your Calendar off the Email page. In the bottom left, you have these symbols?



Second from the left is the Calendar one. Hover over it and you'll get a peek at it without actually changing pages. Alternatively, you can - heaven help us - 'dock the peek'. If, once you've hovered over the Calendar symbol, you slide your mouse up to the top right to the point shown, it'll display the caption 'dock the peek' and choosing that will put your Calendar and appointments as a permanent side-bar to your emails.



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).

Whooo are you? (Who-oo? Who-oo?)

Continuing our Email Special edition, we'd like you to consider who your emails come from. Obviously you know who they say they come from, but are you being deceived?

Here's one. It's from 'Support', which is pretty vague anyway so that should get the flags waving. But what's all that nonsense in blue after it? Well that's who *really* sent it. And while it's nice that they put *exchangelab* in the address to give it a bit of verisimilitude, who the heck is *barcalonesa.com*?

From: Support <no-reply-exchangelab-apcpr01.documentation.protection.ocbc@barcalonesa.com>
Sent: 23 June 2020 03:13
To
Subject: You have Three (3) Messages Pending Delivery

How about this one? A client had this, telling her that her Outlook password was about to expire.

OW Outlook WebApp <pat@casey.net>
To

Oh well, it comes from Outlook WebApp, so that's OK ... except no, see it doesn't. It actually comes from *pat@casey.net* and it's for sure they've got nothing to do with your Outlook password.

Always, ALWAYS look at the real sender. You'll know from your own emails that you send out what a matching set of sender's addresses should look like. Here's mine:

From: Arlene Griffiths <arlene@aspectbc.co.uk>



Yes, there can be very cleverly disguised addresses - we've seen many 'Amazon' emails that at a passing glance look like they come from *amazon.com* but it's actually *amazon.com* or some closely-misspelled variant.

We have gone on about this so, so many times in the past, but we can't stress strongly enough that you need to read

what emails *really* say and not what they seem to say. Read the words, and especially check the sender. If you work in Accounts and receive an email entitled 'invoice', don't just automatically click any attachments or links. Scammers know that *accounts@...* is a very likely address to be valid for an organisation, and yes of course you'll be expecting emails entitled 'invoice'. That's why they aim that particular scam at you.

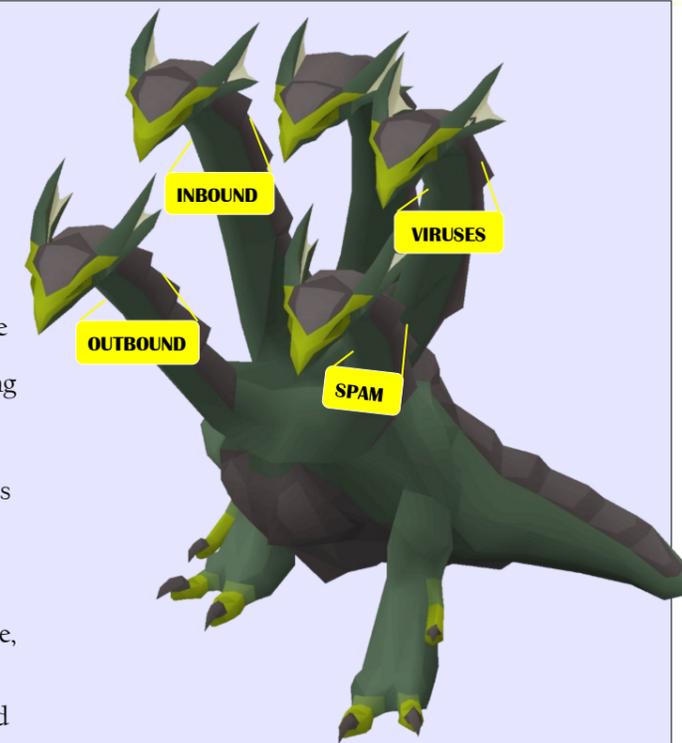
Some email scams are quite sophisticated, we admit, but many rely on user inattention. The scammers make it just good enough to pass a cursory inspection, but trust that you won't take a second look. But we urge you to take that second look. Yes, you may have anti-spam filters, but scammers spend every waking minute trying to find ways around those. It's a constant battle, with you as the last line of defence.

Filtering email - a Herculean task

We had to introduce a new email spam/virus filtering service in July, as the old service was closing down. In actual fact, it limped on till the end of August, because Covid19 meant that many resellers simply didn't have the resources to throw at a big migration like that in the timescales given. But with each new extension only being notified on the day of the latest 'deadline', the pressure never actually lifted.

We admit the first service we tried didn't pan out. It was a good, powerful system, but needed so much configuration that we seemed to be battling new issues every day. Like the Hydra, you lopped one head off and more sprouted in its place. It was *exhausting*, and so with the bags under our eyes qualifying for their own postcode, we cut our losses and assessed a couple of other services. We've got both these in operation now, with the client base split across them according to which system seemed to best suit their circumstances. We want to settle on just one, but at the moment, there are pluses and minuses to each that's making the choice difficult. And of course, they both suffer from comparison with the old system. You *liked* the old system. We liked the old system. But it's gone and will not be back, not even by popular demand.

Word is there's supposed to be a whole raft of developments coming up on one of the systems in the next few months that might tip the balance in its favour, and we're obviously keeping a keen eye on this (the keen eye is the one with the least prominent bags under it).



Email Security ...

As an offshoot of the article above ...

With emails giving us so much gyp during this period, we spent a lot of time identifying different kinds of emails and the way they were being handled.

We noted quite a few password-protected attachments flying about. Nothing odd about that; people do password protect documents before sending them off into cyberspace. After all, you never know who might intercept them.

What really made us scratch our heads was the confession from some people that they actually put the required password *IN THE SAME EMAIL*.

It's like the bank putting your PIN number in the envelope with your new debit card.

**SSSHHHH!!
TOP SECRET KEY -
DO NOT LOSE!**



... and delivery guarantees

... and continuing on the theme of 'things we learned when it was all going horribly wrong' ...

Before we start, can we stress this isn't a criticism, just an observation, and perhaps something to consider:

There seems to be an assumption that an email sent is guaranteed to be an email delivered. Leaving aside the issues we were encountering in the migration (above), there are so many reasons why an email might not get delivered, either immediately or indeed ever. The person you're sending to might have email issues or their broadband could be down. It might have gone to their Junk folder, unnoticed. In any of those cases, you'll be none the wiser as your email won't bounce back to you. You could find your email domain has suddenly been blacklisted, or a mail server you use (such as Office 365) has been. While that's in effect, your emails might go perfectly well to some recipients who don't check those blacklists, leading you to believe everything is fine. Meanwhile some emails could be getting stopped cold by others that do check.

In a nutshell, if it's business critical that someone gets your email, you probably ought to check that they did. There's always the option to ask for a read receipt - true, that's not perfect, as people can opt not to send one, but if it's a regular transaction you have with eg. a supplier, let them know you *need* that read receipt.

When you're despatching your goods, you make sure you get a signature at the other end so you can prove they got there, yes? This is just the same - if it matters to the point where your business will be affected if the email doesn't arrive, you can't just click Send and assume it's job done.

Jargon Buster #35 - NDRs

An **NDR** is a Non-Delivery Receipt (or Report) or, as you will more likely know it, **an email bounce**.

It looks, God help it, like the biggest bunch of nonsense outside of a Trump speech, but there will be a pearl of wisdom within it (... so not very much like a Trump speech actually). It may be only one little line embedded in it, but it will say why your email (or an email to you) bounced. It's why we always ask to see the NDR.

So what sort of errors are we looking for? Well here are some common ones :-

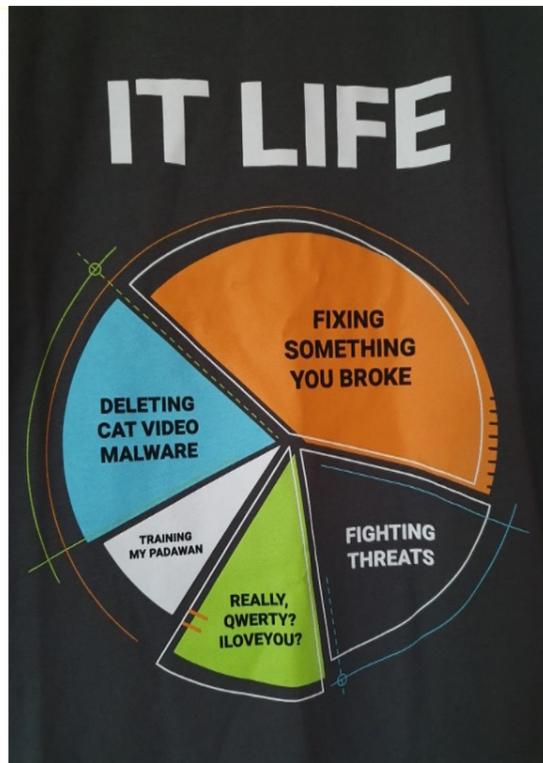
<email address>: Recipient address rejected (or it may say *invalid*): *Access denied*

This usually means one of two things. The email address may simply be wrong, so the server had no idea where to deliver it. But there's a second possibility - if the recipient uses a mail filtering service to weed out spam and viruses, then there's a feature in these called *recipient verification*. If that's enabled, then unless an email address has been entered in the filters, emails from outside the organisation will not get through. So it could be failing either at the filtering stage through not recognising the address, or at the final email server destination. To figure out which, again we need to see the NDR. It will say which system bounced it.

(Be careful as well if you're copying and pasting an email address into the *To*: that you don't bring along any extra characters. We've seen the odd stray quotation mark creep in at the beginning or end of email addresses, and it'll throw them right off. They're really hard to spot at a passing glance too).

Relay Access Denied

This is often caused by a misconfiguration in the DNS - these are the records attached to a domain that tell it, for example, where to point email for that domain. So again, as an example, if you use a mail filter but your domain records haven't been set up correctly to point any mail for your organisation through the filter, anyone sending to you will get this kind of error.



We were sent a freebie T-shirt by one of our vendors recently, which made us smile.

One-liners



"Autocorrect can go straight to he'll."

"Autocorrect has become my worst enema."

"We'll we'll we'll ... if it isn't autocorrect."

"Whoever said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results has obviously never had to reboot a computer."

"The biggest lie in the universe? 'I have read and agree to the Terms and Conditions'."

"Don't use 'beef_stew' as a computer password. It's not stroganoff."

"I got fired from my job at the keyboard factory. They said I wasn't putting in enough shifts."

"My computer suddenly started belting out *Someone Like You*. It's a Dell."

"Instagram is just Twitter for people who go outside."

"I can still remember a time when I knew more than my phone."

"I wish people were like internet videos and you could tap them lightly to get an indication of how much longer they're going to be talking."

British Geography quiz!

Ah, words to strike fear into your hearts! Or are they? Maybe you became a dab hand at the old home schooling thing and can now discourse knowledgeably on tectonic plates, oxbow lakes and erratic boulders. Not that any of those will help you here.

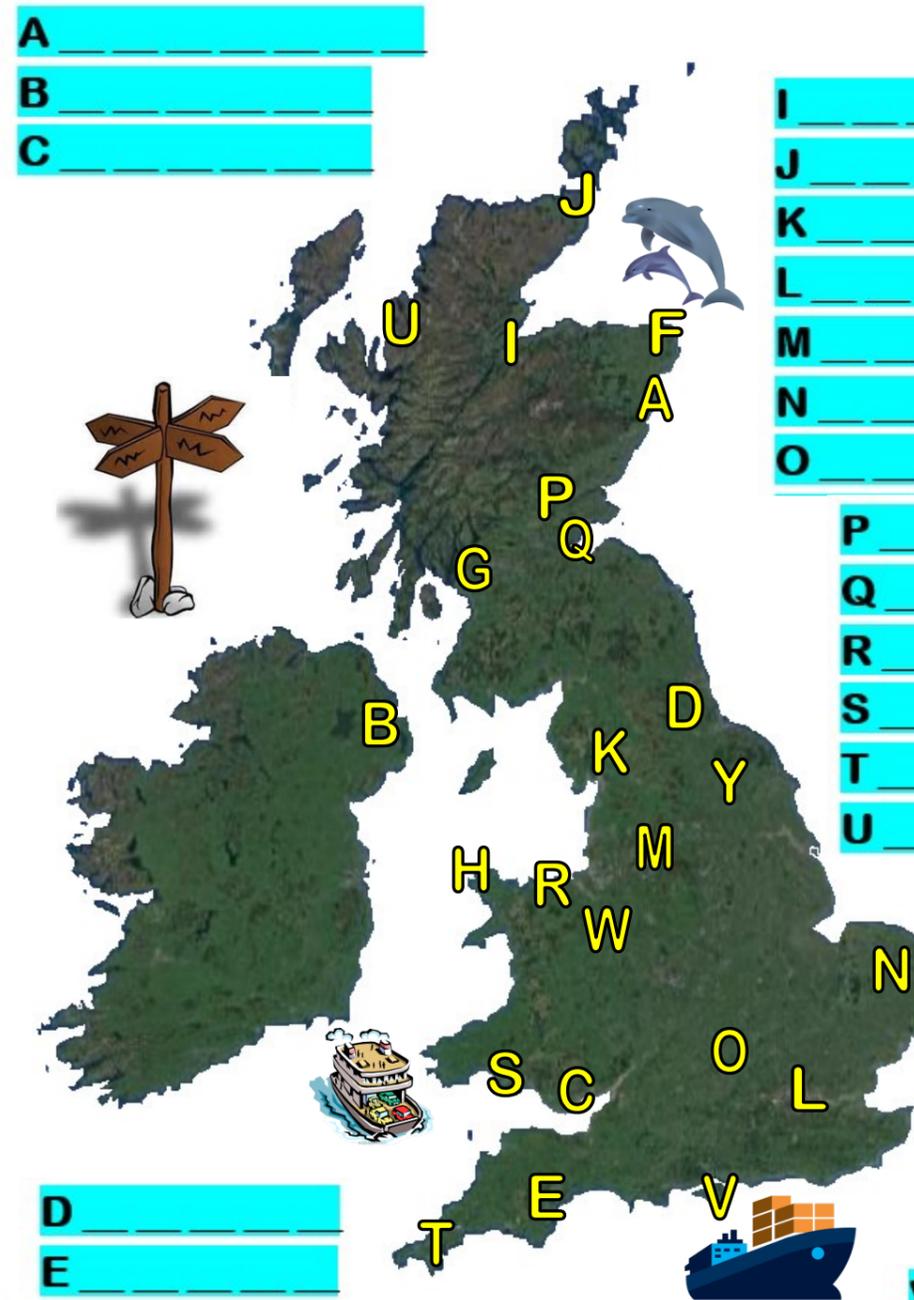
Set out on the map below are the locations of 24 towns and cities, each beginning with the denoted letter. Your mission, should you choose to accept it and not wimp out, is to identify them. We couldn't think of a suitable 'Z'; there are a small handful of places, but none that readily spring to mind. And as for 'X' nope.

Answers on the website (or indeed any map of the UK) - follow the link from the newsletter page.

A _____
B _____
C _____

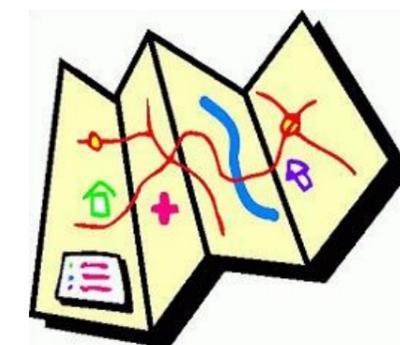
I _____
J _____
K _____
L _____
M _____
N _____
O _____

P _____
Q _____
R _____
S _____
T _____
U _____



D _____
E _____
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Y _____



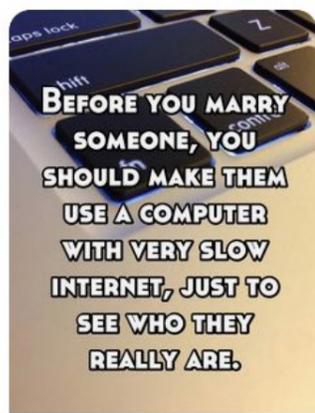
Byeeeeee

Microsoft has announced it is finally dropping Internet Explorer. (We say 'finally' because it gave notice that it intended to back in 2015).

It will disappear from the web on 17 August 2021, but Microsoft Teams won't support it past 30 November this year.

If you continue to use IE after summer of next year, you'll get what they call a 'degraded performance' (which, to be fair, is what a lot of users suffered using it for years).

Microsoft are pushing Edge, as we're sure you're aware (your machine likely rebooted after a Windows update earlier this year to present you with the new Edge browser all over your screen, with a link to Get Started ... but cleverly none to make it go away). But with many users having switched to Chrome or Firefox ages ago due to issues getting to certain websites via IE, it's difficult to know if they'll be bothered to go elsewhere now.



Vassilly's Blog



Wed 1 Jul 9:00am

Payrolls lady is call us all back to Aspects offices. I am full of excites to be seeing everyone again! Even Sergei!! I am love all my Aspects buddies!!!

Wed 1 Jul 9:25am

I am hate everybody at Aspects. Is no Kit-Kat. Payrolls lady say she is not want to be sterilising lid of tin every 5 minutes. Also, no-one is make me cup of tea. Nikki say is not possible to deliver cup of tea and stay proper distance away. OK, so leave mine in kitchen! IT Boss Man say is not room in kitchen for everyone. Well I am not want everyone in kitchen. Just person who is make my tea, and then me when I am collect it. Simples. Payrolls lady say everything is work out if we is prepared to make sacrifices. Fine. I am propose we sacrifice Sergei. Is full moon on Sunday and I am not busy.

Fri 10 Jul

New company is open up next door to Aspects. Ohhhhhhhh. Peoples, they is make CAKES. And PASTRIES. And all manner of goodly things.... Sorry, I am drool into fur a little bit. Payrolls lady is ask if I am maybe want change of career? But I say no, I am loyal to Aspects. She is mumble something about never catching a break.

Wed 15 Jul

Everyone at Aspects is very stressy. I am panic a bit, because Payrolls lady say they is busy firefighting. I am ask where is fire?! She say no, is not real fire. Is lots of fixing problems, all the time, and new one is spring up every minute, like spark from wildfire. Is all to do with emails. If I am understand, things is stop that is meant to go, things is go that is meant to stop and some things is go nowhere at all. (So is like Sergei driving car! Snh-snh-snh!)

Mon 10 Aug

You are miss me, yes? I am being on holidays. Actually I am ready for coming back in July, but Payrolls lady say I am have to self-isolate for two weeks. I am ask if she is sure, because I am holiday in Bridgend, I am not go to foreign places. She say yes, she is very sure I am have to stay away from office for two more weeks. So I am phone her on Friday to see if I am come back today. She say is no reason why not, and she is sure of this because she is look very, very hard for one.

Wed 12 Aug

Is ... so hot. Is like Kalahari, but with less sand and no snakes.

Thurs 13 Aug

Thunderstorms. I am get embarrassed when there is thunderstorms. Frightened? Oh no, I am not get frightened. But fur is stand on end and I am look like I am tumbledried on high setting. Is not good look for ruffy-tuffy 'kat.

Fri 14 Aug

Oh my. So on one side, we are have cakey makers. Two doors other way, café is now start doing pizza. Today, IT Boss Man is treat all of Aspects to pizza lunch. Oh peoples, I think I am become fat 'kat. I am decide to wear mask, on basis it is harder to stuff face. Between you and me, loyal fans, I am also think it is make me look dashing, like Butch Katsidy or Sundance Kit, no? (Payrolls lady say she is not sure about dashing. Runny, maybe. Hmph).

Tues 25 Aug

Storm Ellen. Or is maybe Francis. I am not able to keep up. Is set letterbox to rattling anyway. Nikki is get full of excites that is maybe postman for us, but no. If he is ever rattle our letterbox, is usually with posts for peoples who is move out three years ago or brown envelopes from HMRC. Is never cause for excites.

Mon 7 Sept

IT Boss Man is get surprise box from vendor. Is contain many bags of Gourmet popcorn. But IT Boss Man is on diet. Aspects team is give him full support, and is offer to take temptation away, but he say (a) he is not going to be on diet forever and (b) bags is marked best before March 2021, so get thieving paws off his popcorn.

The Helpdesk of HORROR ...



Just because this is briefer than usual, don't imagine people are getting smarter.

"Who uses this computer?"
"Myself and my son."
"OK, I'm going to need both your passwords please."
"Oh, right. Pinto1976."
"Is that your password or your son's password?"
"Yes."

"Yes, hello, can you tell me how to disconnect service to a mobile phone?"
"Has it been lost, or stolen?"
"No, no. I told my daughter I'd disconnect it if she didn't do her chores. I think it's time to make the threat a reality."
"It'll only take a second."
"OK, great. You may want to lower the volume on your headset. Turn it off ... now."
[Shrieks and swearing in the background - presumably she was mid-call]

"Yeah, hi, I'm struggling to get my new phone set up for my emails?"
"That's fine. I can send you some instructions. You can get email somewhere else, yes?"
"Yeah, yeah. I can pick it up on my PC."
"OK, I'll send them now. Let me know if you're still struggling after you've been through them."
[2 hours later ...]
"I still can't get this to work."
"Did you get my email OK?"
"Yes."
"Did it all make sense?"
"No."
"No?"
"Well I dunno. I didn't read it."

"How do I set my laser printer to stun?"

"Ever since you fixed that paper jam, my computer has been running slower."

"Right, I'm going to remote across to you and we'll see what's going on OK, I'm there. So, which is the menu option that's not working?"
"This one."
"Sorry, which one?"
"THIS one!"
"I can't see where you're pointing, sir."
"HERE!!!" [tap-tap-tap]
"No, you need to show me."
"I AM SHOWING YOU!! [tap!!-tap!!-tap!!]"
"Sir, I can only see your screen. I can't see you. You need to use your mouse to show me, not your finger."
"Oh. Well how was I to know?!"

You've got mail quite a lot of it

One of the issues we encountered in changing spam filtering platforms was - for some people - an increase in spam email.

These unwanted emails go through the filters because there's nothing actually *bad* about them. The senders aren't on a list of spammers, there are no phishing links in the mail, nor malware or viruses hidden anywhere. Just because you don't want to receive the mail doesn't mean there's anything intrinsically harmful in it. The spam filters check against all kinds of criteria to decide whether to deliver mail. Guessing whether you'd be interested unfortunately isn't one of them. (If only, eh? Imagine if the postie sorted out all the junk and opted not to push it through your letterbox). Besides, one man's junk is another man's treasure, as we discovered when sorting out whitelists and blacklists in the changeover. In the same organisation, a sender might appear on one user's whitelist and another user's blacklist.

To be honest, post-lockdown, *all* our mailboxes were flooded with sales emails, advertisements, invitations to webinars, product announcements and the like. After months of dormant trade, it was time to Sell, Sell, Sell.

It's also worth remembering that new systems can take some time to train - you may not recall, being as it's a few years ago now, but the old system took a bit of getting used to as well. Again, you're comparing the new system with the system you'd spent years knocking into shape.

