Addiction

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

My name is John and I am an addict. I am addicted to being connected, on-line, part of the digital world. Last week there was a fire about twenty miles away. No one was hurt. Just the fiber cabling for 130,000 telephone lines. Of course this happened at four in the morning.

Being an insomniac, and unaware of the fire, I naturally assumed it was something I had caused. Down came the routers, down came my machines. Nothing obviously wrong, but at that time of the morning I had nothing better to do. I reinstalled a machine. Still nothing would work. In desperation I turned to my notes. These are little jottings that I end up occasionally making to ensure I can follow the instructions step by step and know everything will work. Another install later and still nothing.

Dawn arrived and the chance to phone other like minded insomniacs. As the telephone worked and the data is also carried by that line I could see no reason for a problem. Another fellow non-sleeper was also having problems. Time pasted and frustration grew. Being unable to check web status pages was an annoyance. The rest of the local world

slowly woke up. A quick call to my ISP found that I was connected as far as the local exchange. With a promise to chase up the problem, it was partially out of my hands for an hour.

Breakfast and a read of the morning papers. No web cartoons as my dailystrips script would not fetch the images. Still plenty to do without the web. I could live without it for an hour. A slow hour passed. I had a list of searches I wanted to complete, a couple of programs to download and email to be sent out. A second hour crawled by. More emails pending, but at least I had tidied up some files and deleted old weblinks. Early lunch.

By accident, I switched on the television in time to catch the news. As soon as they announced the fire, the phone rang. The ISP asked if I had seen the news and explained that data was split at the local exchange, and routed via the fire-damaged lines. As all the emergency services in the area were down, any excess routing capacity would be switched to them, and data cables would be repaired whenever they could be. This at least explained why I was offline.

A week without access could be a vacation, a chance to do all those things that I put off until I have more time. This could be fun. Well, that feeling lasted a couple of minutes, until I remembered my email slowly building up on a server somewhere. The rest of the day passed without incident. I learnt a couple of new key combinations for some graphics packages and found out just how much I disliked some radio stations.

The following day I uncovered some old hardware and spent a happy couple of hours replacing chips until it worked. The slot car racing game was eventually switched off after using up another set of batteries. Jigsaws were completed, pictures hung, rooms cleaned – that is, computers were stacked in neater piles. I even attempted some DIY.

Unfortunately, as each hour passed, I missed my email. I also missed the ability to just browse for an answer. After two days I could not stand the withdrawal any longer, and was reduced to driving thirty miles to borrow a friend's fast link. This was similar to going back in time. I had to plan what I wanted to do beforehand. I found that I looked forward with passion to these uplink times.

Eventually the dataline was restored, and I am happy again, working through a backlog of email. I never completed all those things I had saved to do on a rainy day. Although I am determined to spend a part of each evening not online. I am sure I will still assume next time that it is something I have done wrong rather than someone else. I love my connection, but I think I need to start to plan to live without it, just in case.

Trust all is well,

John

John Southern
Editor

Monthly UserFriendly

Linux Magazine is delighted to announce that from this month onwards we will be publishing a UserFriendly cartoon in the magazine.

Since a few days after it was launched in November 1997, we have sought our daily laugh from the cartoon. More often than not, we have shed tears of joy at the cutting, topical humor based around the employees of Columbia Internet.

You will find this month' UserFriendly cartoon on page 95 – enjoy!