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Just One Of Those Hellish Days

By Dagmar Rakos

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That was one of those days – I call them hell days, my friends call them haunted – when nothing seemed to work.

Everything what could go wrong, went.

First my main desktop computer played it's favorite "dead beetle" game and didn't want to turn on until I forced it with the main On/Off switch at the back.

Then my ISP provider pretended I don't exist and quietly and efficiently kicked me off the Net few seconds after my modem finally forced it's way to their server.

Seems like ancient Latin would be easier to communicate with at times than this "computerese" both of the machines are supposed to understand.

(I wonder when finally the time will come when kicking off your own customers without first even giving them the opportunity of choice will become non-acceptable in civilized society.

Actually I am more afraid it will spread and in a few years we can find ourselves at the front of the food store where we just

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been kicked out few minutes after we entered and gave them our money – bouncing at it's door and pleading: "Let me in! Please, let me in! I honestly Do need to eat!")

– After I finally was able to log on and successfully closed down few automatic pop-ups for various communication and protection software I never heard off I found out that email from my hosting company is still in the stage of evolution where according to some mysterious laws of cyber-universe email messages to "anything-I-put-here@makeyourhobbysell.com" will go through, but messages to "dagmar@makeyourhobbysell.com" will be

rejected by my hosting company vigilant server as a "bad, malfunctioned address". Or maybe they are just finicky, they simply don't like my name.

Anyway, it's too personal and what-do-I-think Internet belongs to machines it doesn't need some stupid softy human touch...

When I clawed my way through my handy Mailwasher anti-spam preview program, and marked the usual spam dirt (offers for enlarged penis, and Viagra and such stuff – mind you I am a woman!) from my boxes on the servers – incredibly enough this time all my hosts and even fussy ISP didn't object to bouncing the spam dirt back to its senders.

Then as a kick to my over-inflated ego (from at least something finally working) I got a message from my credit card processing company that they changed everything they could due to enhancement of their service, and everything will be better and safer and faster and brighter, and nice and sunny, blah, blah, blah... (all that jazz) – which automatically raised my "Catastrophe!" alert sensors at their highest level – and the "insignificant triviality" they want from me is to go to their site and check my user ID and password and if it doesn't work get myself a new one.

Naturally my red light of High Alert/Danger! was correct – as by the time even the first page of their "efficiently improved" site downloads, I am able to go to washroom, clean my hands, break up my 2 little terriers fight for one of my new shoes I forgot to hide into closet, and get myself a drink.

Then after my return to computer I find out that of course I was "affected" with all those improvements as my old merchant ID

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and password don't work anymore, so after another round of breaks (including walking with the dogs around the backyard) – I am able to set up my new user name and password.

Finally I am let inside my new super duper over-secured merchant account only to find out that That's all! I am inside, but I am not allowed to do anything – not even see my personal info, not to mention my products.

Obviously I am not authorized to view my own merchant account because for sure I am breaking some of those newest super-duper efficient security measures, and no doubt breaking also Geneva's peace conventions, not to mention main guidelines of NATO's Supreme Command and a couple of Helsinki's pacts – and everything about me has been documented including my age, sex (yes, I do like it!), location, eating habits (yes, I do eat in

front of my computer!), the size of my shoes, and the matter I haven't washed my hands before I came back to the keyboard after playing with my dogs while I was waiting for their page to appear on my screen.

Besides, how do I ever dare to want something from them when they already have my money and the number of my Credit card!

After I finally gave up and I wrote a support ticket to them – which went happily ignored for the next 28 hours till I was able to fix it by myself the next day repeating laboriously all the steps again with another ID and another password (obviously my personal name is not liked here in North America) – I attempted to download one .exe file but my favorite monster download program Go!zilla had obviously more important things to do than to be bothered by some boring download.

So I right clicked and attempted to save the file through my browser which did at least show me the open envelope icon which means in Microsoftese doing "something", but disappeared after few seconds without giving me the choice where I actually want this thing to reside on my computer – apparently got lost somewhere inside the final frontiers of cyber-space where no human being ever been yet.

3 minutes after my Internet connection was gleefully cut off for the 28th time, my computer delivered me another one of it's favorites: Not enough memory!

Not enough memory...?

Right! Evidently that is too much to ask from Pentium III machine, with 550 MHz processor, 128 MB of RAM and 40 GB Hard-drive to run 2 browsers and 2 Notepads simultaneously. How do I dare? I can type, or cut and paste, don't I?

I gave up before the blue screen of computer death kicked in.

At least I have a motivation to go for a High speed access...
– so I can get my error messages and computer "surprises" much faster!

One of these days....

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None

Are Chat Rooms A Menace To Your Children?

By "T. O' Donnell"

My answer would be: yes, with qualifications.

I've been running internet chat rooms since 1998, at

. Nothing

fancy. The software was freely available. I just had to make some important modifications: adding bad word filters and automated 'kicking' (ejection from the rooms).

You think free speech is a good thing, until you read what anonymous, malevolent young men say to fifteen-year-old girls. It isn't Shakespeare, let me tell you that.

That's another key point: anonymity. A pillar of the free speech argument. Let freedom fighters and the repressed masses have their say! Except it's more likely a twenty-five-year-old sociopath pretending to

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be sixteen and making young girls cry with his sickening profanity.

Free from all morés, and safe from physical retribution, we see the contents of the subconscious pour forth unrestrained. And a hellish stream of psychic sewage it is.

This can be combated by bad word filters and having human moderators. The most important shield of all, I think, is education. "Don't take candy from strangers", "You don't need drugs until you're ill", and now: "Don't bandy words with trolls" (people who deliberately upset other internet users with provocative language).

Most chat rooms now have an 'ignore' function. It's a bit like the hooligan in the street: he's *looking* for a reaction; if you ignore him, it's infuriating. To him. You glide on by, figuratively speaking, while he rants on unheard.

Parents should take an interest in what their children are doing online. See if you can find out what service they've joined, and join up yourself; get a taste of it. Teenagers define themselves as adults-to-be by choosing a different path to their parents: if you are conservative, they'll try liberalism, and vice-versa.

Therefore, you shouldn't try to join in with their activities as an equal; just keep informed.

They may gripe, but secretly they're glad you care. A parent who lets their child do whatever they want gives them no standard to measure themselves against.

Another problem with basic chat rooms is that you can develop an intense relationship with someone you can't see and haven't met in the flesh; there's a fantasy element. Your thoughts pour forth freely, you believe you've met a soul mate. You may even meet them, and the illusion continues ...

... until you eventually realise he or she is just a human being after all, and breaks wind like everyone else.

There is hope, however. With the advent of cheap digital video cameras, internet telephony and broadband, people will be less able to hide: "What do you mean, you're shy? You weren't shy a minute

ago!". Old-fashioned, sensible prejudices will assert themselves: "Sooooo, 'Zorro' from Cambridge is really fat, spotty Darren from Dartford ... next!".

T. O' Donnell

is an ecommerce consultant in London, UK. His latest project is a

freeware loan calculator, available at

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