

That was the news that was!

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For this edition of ETHicol a review of just two papers in the UK has been undertaken for one week to see what, if any, are the current ethical issues with ICT. It seems that ICT is a problematic as ever.

Trade Press

Read these seven extracts from Computer Weekly. They reveal that serious ethical issues continue to challenge the industry. The balance between the need to substantiate ones identity and civil liberty continues to be in the news with the announcement of the new ID card. Hacking in various forms is an ongoing issue as ICT pervades our lives and opens up new opportunities for those with criminal or antisocial tendencies. Property theft remains a big issue as intellectual property owners strive to protect their property. ICT's environmental track record has become a hot topic with use of raw materials and energy consumption being challenged. The final story is a good example of how a new technology can change the way we interact with each other – have we ever stopped to consider the implications of this before we embark down a road that cannot be easily changed.

Identity revealed

“The design of the ID cards that British citizens will carry has been unveiled today. Each card will have a photograph of a face and will contain the name, date of birth and signature of the holder. It will hold similar information to that currently contained in the UK passport but will also a feature biometrics, with a photograph and fingerprints stored on a secure electronic chip.”

Hacking new media

“Apple has failed to issue a security patch for a vulnerability that could allow criminals to take control of iPhones using text messages, say security researchers. Apple was believed to be working on a patch after researchers notified the firm of a vulnerability in the way the iPhone handles text messages. They warned that once exploited, the iPhone flaw could be used to take control of the devices dialling, web browsing and texting functions.”

Intelligence Hacking

“The website of MI5 was breached by hackers when a search engine related to it was penetrated. The problem was not a direct threat but it is cause for concern, according to security experts. According to a report in the Daily Express the hackers could have put viruses on the computers of people using the website and find out their identities.”

The weakest link

“The first crack to defeat the anti-piracy mechanism built into Microsoft's forthcoming Windows 7 operating system has been reported three months before general release. Reports of the crack for the Ultimate edition come less than a week after Windows 7 was released to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), according to Softpedia. The crack is based on a product activation key and certificate believed to have been extracted from an OEM copy of Windows 7 that was leaked on a Chinese web forum. The crack is believed to be limited to the Ultimate edition, but can be used on all machines for both the 32-bit and 64-bit versions of the operating system. And if a user has a retail version of Windows 7 Ultimate, it can be converted to an OEM version with two simple commands, and then activated, according to Ars Technica.”

Property theft

“Businesses across Europe, the Middle East and Africa have paid out £6m this year to settle disputes with the Business Software Alliance. The BSA has received £435,000 from UK companies in settlements and payments for getting properly licensed in the first half of this year. Overall, firms across EMEA paid out £2.1m in settlements and £4m in licence costs. The BSA has pursued a policy of taking legal action against companies that break software licensing laws and accepting settlements from those that are prepared to admit wrongdoing.”

Environment

“Greenpeace protesters demonstrated outside HP's US head office today to highlight the hardware maker's policy on using toxic chemicals in its production processes. HP [said it] supports industry efforts to eliminate BFR and PVC because of potential e-waste issues. HP is a worldwide leader in e-waste recycling. HP has recycled £1bn of electronic products between 1987 and 2007, and has committed to recycling another £1bn worth between 2008 and 2011”

New ways of communicating

“The UK government has published a guide explaining why and how public sector bodies should use Twitter. The government is joining businesses, including banks, in harnessing Twitter to communicate with customers effectively. The government is encouraging MPs and civil servants to use the microblogging website, which allows users to post 140-character messages in real time.”

Popular Press

It is not just the trade press that carries such stories the popular press often has ICT stories with an ethical dimension. The Guardian had several of the stories that ran in Computer Weekly. There were other stories. Read the three extracts for the Guardian in the same week. Catching computer criminals is one thing but bringing them to justice is another. ICT has revolutionised information exchange but sometimes this can be detrimental to the public at large. The file sharing legacy of Napster continues with the debacle over The Pirate Bay.

Hacker extradition

“There were emotional scenes outside the high court today after computer hacker Gary McKinnon lost a further attempt to avoid his extradition to America on charges of breaching US military and Nasa computers. The verdict follows the latest in a long line of legal moves by McKinnon, who describes himself as a "UFO enthusiast", after he was accused in 2002 of using his home computer to hack into 97 US military and Nasa computers, causing more than \$700,000 in damage according to the US.”

Too much information?

“The online encyclopedia Wikipedia has become embroiled in a bitter row with psychologists after a Canadian doctor posted answers to controversial tests on the site. The Rorschach test is designed to give psychologists a window into the unconscious mind, but many now fear their patients will try to outwit them by memorising the "right" answers. The row erupted when hospital doctor James Heilman from Saskatchewan posted all ten inkblot plates on Wikipedia alongside the most common responses given to each. Heilman uploaded the images after becoming frustrated by a debate on the website as to whether a single Rorschach inkblot plate should be taken down. "I just wanted to raise the bar," he said. The move brought immediate condemnation from psychologists who signed on to complain that making the tests public renders them useless. "Making images available on the internet will make it obsolete and we will have lost a helpful tool," said one.”

File sharing

“In yet another legal blow for The Pirate Bay, a court in the Netherlands has ruled that the file sharing site must block its site for Dutch internet users within 10 days or face stiff fines. Failure to comply with the ruling will result in fines of €30,000 a day up to a maximum of €3m for the three founders of the site, Peter Sunde Kolmisoppi, Fredrik Neij and Gottfrid Svartholm Warg. This comes after a dozen movie studios filed a suit seeking to shut down the site this week. They were seeking the injunction after an April ruling by a Swedish court that found the three founders and funder Carl Lundström guilty of helping millions of people download copyrighted material. They were given one-year prison terms and fined 30m kronor (£9.1m).”

ICT remains an ethical melting pot. Professionals have obligations and responsibilities to ensure the melting pot does not spill or that we do not get our fingers burnt.

Please send your views on ethical and social responsibility issues, and cases of ethical dilemmas to:

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