

SHEERAN I.T. NEWS

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IT Mission

Information Technology is a tool for productivity. Our overarching goal is to **proactively contribute to the company's success.**

SHEERAN'S NEW ECOMMERCE SOLUTION

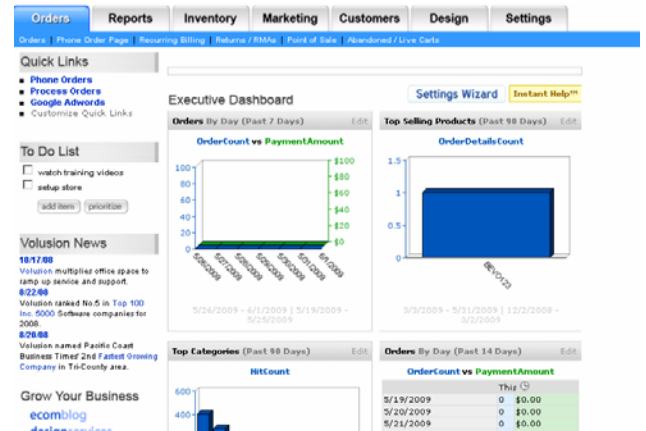
The IT department has been steadily working on an eCommerce web site, using a new tool that combines all aspects of eCommerce into a single back-end solution. The tool allows Sheeran to interface with TOPS for inventory control and order processing, while also allowing clients to customize the site look and feel.

We expect to launch this new web site within the next couple of weeks (keep your eyes open for a big party in Lori's office post-launch!).

The site includes many features, such as:

- Phone ordering—for customer services reps entering orders on behalf of customers.
- Customer import from existing sites
- Credit card processing
- Returns, RMAs
- Reports & queries

- Search Engine Optimization
- ROI Tracking
- Import/export (for inventory, orders, and reporting purposes)
- Coupons and discounts
- Changes to web pages without programming charges



MOBILE DELIVERY CONSIDERATIONS

Some companies require all mobile clients to use one specific device, and they develop their mobile applications for that one device only (iPhone, Blackberry, Palm, Android). Other companies insist their mobile applications work for any device. However, creating a fully mobilized application that isn't browser-based and that will accommodate an ever-growing list of mobile operating systems often requires expensive middleware and high development costs.

The easiest way around device-specific complexity is to develop the mobile application using browser-based access. The drawback to browser-based applications is that they require a connection in order to work. For example, a browser-based application cannot be used in a coverage dead-spot or on an airplane.

Another mobile consideration is the rapidly-

changing market itself. Apple's iPhone operating system is already up to version 3.0 in less than two years. Android, which was hardly known a year ago, now has developer toolkits and sample code available from hundreds of sites. Custom mobile applications must keep up with the changing operating system software. Those applications that are written for multiple devices have multiple operating systems to consider.

Sheeran has applications that are already browser-based. The IT department has been investigating how to make these more efficient for mobile access. Our new web portal, for example, can be accessed from a Blackberry, but the reports aren't very pretty. With a few tweaks, we can mobile-enable this service and offer our clients a new delivery option, with very little IT cost.

PREVENT EXCEL FROM CONVERTING FRACTIONS TO DATES

Left to its own devices, Excel will annoyingly convert your fractions into dates as soon as you enter them into your spreadsheet. For example, enter 1/25 and Excel foolishly changes it to 25-Jan. If you subsequently try to reformat the cell as a fraction, Excel will convert it to 39838, which is the internal number that represents 25-Jan.

Annoyed yet?

To get around this problem, simply format the column (or row/individual cell) to fraction format BEFORE you enter data. Here are the steps:

- Select the column/row/cell
- Right-click the selection
- Select Format Cells
- In the Number tab, select Fraction (under 'category')
- Under Type, select 'Up to 2 digits 21/25), then click OK.

It is better to make an imperfect decision that moves the project forward today than to spend months vacillating and pontificating while time and money fly out the door.

Patrick Gray via
TechRepublic's IT
Leadership blog

Laws of IT Physics

As my daughter can confirm (and much to her dismay), I love physics. So this TechRepublic article titled "Laws of IT Physics" got my attention. Here are just a few of the 11 laws from the initial article:

1. Planning is a continuous process, not a one-time event.
2. Complexity kills IT projects since defects and security vulnerabilities increase non-linearly with increased complexity.
3. Schedules and project chaos create event horizons, from which a project cannot recover. In general relativity

(ah, physics!), an event horizon is a boundary inside which events cannot affect an outside observer. Combine a complex technical environment with a complicated project schedule and workflow, and meltdown becomes life. *Simplify whenever possible.*

4. The initial requirements for any large system will be incomplete, independent of the resources expended to develop them. Include budget for anticipated and actual requirements change.
5. Not controlling the right things assures failure.

Simplify, simplify, simplify!

IPv6— An Introduction to Internet Protocol v6

IPv4 is the current default protocol of the Internet. It was deployed in 1981 with IP addresses defined as 32-bit numbers. Here's what this means in real terms (in case binary math isn't your thing) — the number of IP addresses available is 2^{32} , or 4,294,967,296. This may sound like plenty of IP addresses, but in fact we're running out.

Enter IPv6. Its 128-bit number expands the available IP addresses from 2^{32} to 2^{128} . Exactly how many IP addresses is this? An unbelievable: 340,282,366,920,938,463,463,374,607,431,768,211,456!

What does this change mean to you? Probably not much. The Internet Protocol folks, in their remarkable wisdom, have created a method of functioning that allows both versions to operate simultaneously on networks. Over time, applications will start using more IPv6 over IPv4. Net-

work devices, such as switches and hubs, will pass the IPv6 packets along just like they've always passed IPv4.

IPv6 celebrated its 10th anniversary in December, 2008. Yet in a 2008 study by Google, it still represents less than one percent of Internet-enabled machines in any given country (http://www.ripe.net/ripe/meetings/ripe-57/presentations/Colitti-Global_IPv6_statistics_-_Measuring_the_current_state_of_IPv6_for_ordinary_users_.7gzD.pdf).

There are other benefits to IPv6 as well, such as security and simplified processing by routers. As with any new technology, the biggest issues will be with legacy equipment, which may not support the new protocol. At this time, the experts expect the current IPv4 address space to be depleted by 2011.

IS YOUR COMPUTER INFECTED?

Be alert! After you open and run an infected program or attachment on your computer, you might not realize that you've introduced a virus until you notice something isn't quite right. Here are some signs that your computer might be infected:

- Your computer runs more slowly than normal
- Your computer stops responding or locks up often
- Your computer crashes and restarts every few minutes
- Your computer restarts on its own and then fails to run normally

- Applications on your computer don't work correctly
- Disks or disk drives are inaccessible
- You can't print normally
- You see unusual error messages
- You see distorted menus and dialog boxes

These are common symptoms of infection-but they might also indicate hardware or software problems that have nothing to do with a virus.

Be smart! Do not ignore the symptoms. Write them down, especially the text of any unusual error messages.

Look for a pattern, and make a note of it. For example, are all of your applications affected? Is the problem only with printing? When does your system crash?

Contact your network administrator (computer help desk) or your Internet Service Provider, or call the technical support number provided by the manufacturer of your system. The technician may advise you to stop using your computer. If so, follow that advice. Short-term inconvenience is better than losing all your data or having your identity stolen.

THE NECESSITY OF A WIENIE

One of the RSS feeds I subscribe to is the Creative Energy Officer (don't you just love that title!) — Ideas and insights for optimistic, yet cynical leaders. A recent post was titled "Why your organization needs a wienie". It got my attention, if only because it was such a strange title.

The "wienie" here is tied to a story about Walt Disney in 1964, working on a draft plan for the World's Fair. According to the story, Walt wasn't quite satisfied, saying "It doesn't have a wienie." The wienie is the finishing touch — the delightful bonus — the extra on top. Walt added an animatronics dog with a wagging tail, which put his plan over the top. Wienies are what you add when you already have good, but not good enough.

We see examples everyday of where wienies could be added. At the local grocery store—how much more pleasant the experience when the checkout clerks smiles and says a sincere "Thank you". This friendly behavior is so rare these days, that I find myself very surprised when it actually happens. While driving—how nice when someone yields to you. Anywhere expectations are fairly low, you have enormous potential to add a wienie.

Within the IT department, I personally like to see exceptionally fast response to client support requests. When a web support request comes into our department, I think we

should respond within two hours (good response time). Turning this into the "wienie" might reduce it to 15 minutes (exceptional response time).

When working with customers and vendors, I like to see smiling faces. Even on the phone, people can hear you smile. Being pleasant while performing everyday tasks can be the extra on top.

Wienies are extra. They are what you give the audience after they think they're already satisfied. Another IT example is our web portal, which clients use to access their reporting data. Clients expect the site to provide them with reports and excel data. Add a few graphical charts and the client is impressed. Make a few tweaks to allow the information to be retrieved from a mobile device and the client is even more impressed.

Think about places you can add a wienie to your own life. What can you add to make you stand out above the crowd?

Want more information about the "wienie" concept? Visit: <http://creativeenergyblog.wordpress.com/?s=wienie>

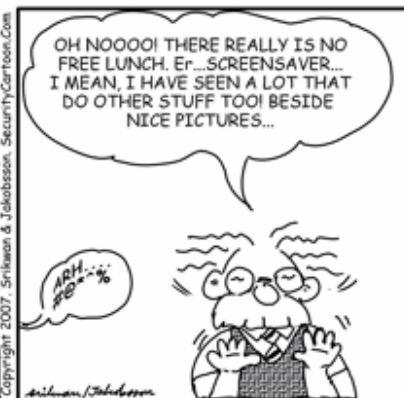
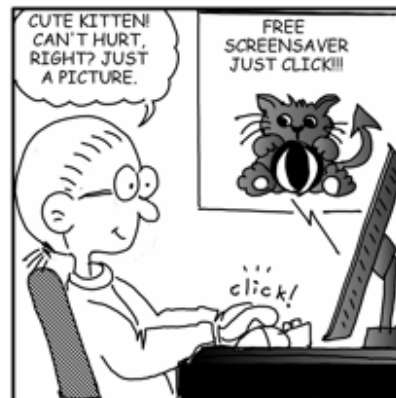
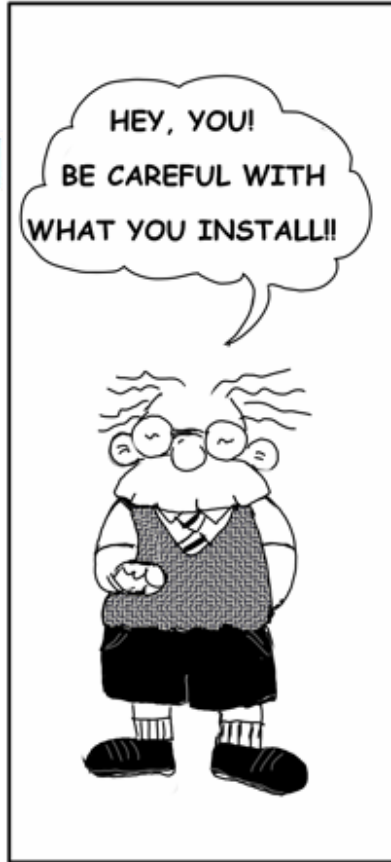
Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things.

— Sir Isaac Newton



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More About Botnets

All this modern technology just makes people try to do everything at once.

— Hobbes (Calvin & Hobbes)

A botnet, also known as a "zombie army," is usually made up of tens to hundreds of thousands of home computers sending emails by the millions.

How do botnets get started?

Criminals install hidden software on your computer in several ways. First, they scan the Internet to find computers that are unprotected, and then install software through those "open doors." Spammers may send you an email with attachments, links or images that install hidden software. Sometimes just visiting a website or downloading files may cause a "drive-by download," which installs malicious software that could turn your computer into a "bot".

How can I tell if my computer is part of a botnet?

It can be difficult to tell if a spammer has installed hidden software on your computer, but there are some warning signs.

- You may receive emails accusing you of sending spam.
- You may find email messages in your "outbox" that you didn't send.

- Your computer may suddenly operate more slowly or sluggishly.
- Programs that used to run on your computer no longer run.
- Your hard drive is spinning (making a noise) when you are not using your computer.

What can I do to prevent botnetting?

Botnets are not inevitable. You can help reduce the chances of your computer becoming part of a botnet by:

- Using anti-virus and anti-spyware software and keeping it up to date.
- Setting your operating system to download and install security patches automatically.
- Being cautious about opening or downloading email attachments.
- Using a firewall to protect your computer from hacking attacks.
- Disconnecting your computer from the Internet when you're away from it
- Checking your "sent items" or "outgoing" mailbox for messages you did not intend to send.

Source: <https://www.sans.org/newsletters/ouch>