On Demand Streaming Service

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Volume 34:2 - [KEYNOTES ON THE WEB]
Back copies of Keynotes can be found at:
www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/offdocs/keynotes

News in Brief

News

From the Editor

There was much interest in the plans for a streaming service announced in the last issue of Keynotes. On page 4, Anthony Leonard gives an update as the trial service becomes available.

If you use a supported PC, you'll know that you have access to a large portfolio of software packages, and you'll be used to the regular message on your taskbar telling you that another new program is all available. How does it all get there, and can the process become even more efficient? Find out on page 5.

The day-to-day work of the Computing Service is always supplemented by a variety of ongoing projects aimed at improving existing services, or introducing new facilities.

In this issue of Keynotes you can find updates on a number of current projects, including the PHP Service (page 4), Windows XP Office Upgrade (page 6) and Wiki Implementation (page 6).

JOANNE CASEY

keynotes

Information Desk Closure
BRIAN SOUTER

The Information Desk has for some years been scheduled to close between 14.00 and 15.00 each Wednesday to allow the desk staff to attend training sessions. More recently, the desk staff have been encouraged to attend departmental meetings and internal presentations which are held at various times across the week.

We now propose to move away from the regular Wednesday slot and schedule closure of the desk as required to allow staff to attend various departmental events. Our aim will be to limit closure to just once or twice a week, with all closures advertised on YorkExtra the previous week.

We are aware of the inconvenience that closing the desk may cause, but we are certain everyone will appreciate the importance of keeping first line support staff informed.

Staff News MIKE JINKS

Welcome to Dominique Papworth, who has joined us as a member of the Technical Services Group, from a similar role at Askham Bryan College. We hope she will enjoy working with us.

And we say goodbye to Alistair Edgar, whose departure in November created the vacancy which Dominique has now filled. Alistair is now working as an IT contractor in Leeds, and planning a return to his native New Zealand - we wish him well in the future.

DOMINIQUE PAPWORTH

PC Room Maintenance BRIAN SOUTER

We currently manage 503 PCs across 19 locations on campus, and each year set out a programme of works to maintain and improve these facilities.

In 2008, a number of tasks will be scheduled over the Easter and Summer vacations including replacing 115 PCs in rooms G/022 and A/EW/004. As part of the programme, all remaining PCs will be cleaned, checked and rebuilt, and electrically safety tested to conform to regulations. The work will require one room in turn to be closed each week throughout the Easter and Summer vacations; the detailed programme will be published on the web in due course.

Keyboard Short Cuts In Excel SUSANNE HODGES

Keyboard shortcuts are very useful – here are some that can be used in Excel spreadsheets:

Ctrl+Space selects a column

Shift+Space selects a row

Ctrl+Arrow key moves the cursor along a series of cells

Ctrl+Page Up (or Page Down) will move through your worksheets

Alt+= brings up the Auto Sum feature. Although it usually "guesses" correctly which cells to sum, if it is incorrect it is simple to fix.

The **F4** key repeats the last command you performed

Alt+I and then **R** inserts a row

Alt+I and then **C** inserts a column

Shift+F11 inserts a new worksheet

Ctrl + Shift + Space bar selects the printable area on the current worksheet.

Ctrl+Shift+1 formats the cell as a number (with two decimal places)

Ctrl+Shift+3 formats the cell as a date

Ctrl+Shift+4 formats the cell as currency

Ctrl+Shift+5 formats the cell as percent

Ctrl+Shift+# removes all formatting from a cell.

Thanks to the OfficeUsers.org newsletter for the original text of this article, published on 21 February 2008.

Paying For Printing Online
BRIAN SOUTER

Adding money to printer accounts online using a debit or credit card is proving very popular. Over 50% of payments are now made using the University Online Payments System rather than by cash payments at the Computing Service Information Desk.

To add money to your printing account online using a debit or credit card:

. Go to **www.york.ac.uk/go/infodesk**

. Click on 'Printing Accounts'

. Follow the on-screen instructions

Easter Bank Holidays
BRIAN SOUTER

The Computing Service building and Information Desk will be closed on the two bank holidays during the Easter Vacation: Good Friday (21 March) and Easter Monday (24 March).

All services will be available as usual outside normal hours; no staff will be on duty to attend to faults, and access to classroom PCs will be subject to college opening hours. To save energy, classroom PCs which are regularly shutdown each evening are not restarted automatically outside term; users will need to switch them on as required.

On-Demand Streaming - Trial Service Now Available
ANTHONY LEONARD

As announced in last term's Keynotes, the Computing Service is now making its media streaming infrastructure generally available to staff as a trial service running until this Autumn. The service, which uses similar streaming technology as used by the BBC iPlayer, should be useful to those with access to video or audio material interested in making them available over the web in various contexts, e.g. YorkWeb pages for departmental or institutional outreach, or YorkShare course sites for teaching. Needless to say, staff participation in the trial is needed to help the Computing Service understand the long-term support implications of such a service.

The trial streaming service will support a restricted number of file formats, encodings, and players carefully selected to serve a wide range of users' needs. These will include MP3, AAC and WMA for audio; MPEG-4 (H.264) and WMV for video. During the trial limited assistance with file format conversion will be given where practicable. Access control and content management integration with YorkShare and YorkWeb will be the subject of ongoing development.

Initially those interested in using the service will require access to a University web account, i.e. the Computing Service account used to update your departmental web pages on YorkWeb (if you do not have access to such an account please contact your Departmental Computing Officer). A limited amount of filestore dedicated to media streaming will be made available to your web account on request, together with more detailed information on how to deploy and playback your material.

For more information, please see: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/stream**

PHP Service **CARL STOVELL**

A PHP service is now available. To register you must be a YorkWeb account owner (ie you have access to a www.york.ac.uk "web updater" account).

PHP is a widely-used general-purpose scripting language especially suited for Web development. If you are interested in learning more about PHP, visit **http://php.net**

Registration requests should be emailed to **infodesk@york.ac.uk**, giving the York-Web account name and your intended use of PHP.

Your PHP applications and code may need to be updated or revised when the service is upgraded or to address newly identified security risks: it is the account owner's responsibility to ensure that they, or a member of their team, has the PHP knowledge necessary to maintain their site.

Before requesting an account please read all the service details and conditions at **php.york.ac.uk/phpinfo.html**

Improved filestore backups **AIMEE PHILLIPS**

Darren Miller has been working to improve the backups which are a feature of the centrally provided filestore. One key point is that users now have the ability to instantly access files deleted or modified up to 90 days previously.

Darren will give more details in the next issue of Keynotes, and it will be publicised on the web. In the meantime, users of Windows XP office PCs will be pleased to see how easily they can now access backups. Use Windows Explorer to select a file or folder on the H: or M: drives, or in rented or Yorkweb filestore, view its Properties, and select the **Previous Versions** tab to access versions created in the last five days.

New Look Directory
MAX SPICER

The Computing Service have given the University's Online Directory a new look, in line with the overall Web re-design, from 16 January. Not only does it look better, it is easier to use and more accessible.

The Directory takes its information from the Human Resources and Student record systems, so these should be kept up to date. To change a phone number or room location, contact telephony on 100 or **telephony@york.ac.uk**.

Other information can be changed by contacting the Personnel Office or using the Student eVision system, as appropriate. To control who can see your details, follow the link at the bottom of the search page which reads 'Configure your own directory entry'.

If you have queries about the new Directory, please contact the Computing Service Information Desk on 3838 or **infodesk@york.ac.uk**.

The Directory's new address is **https://www.york.ac.uk/directory/**, and the internal version (for staff or student use) is at **https://www.york. ac.uk/directory/user.yrk/**

People who visit the old Directory address will be automatically redirected.

Is My Washing Done Yet?
JOANNE CASEY

Members of the Network Group have been working in conjunction with Commercial Services, Estates, and an external company to provide a utility allowing students to check on the usage of washers and dryers in College laundries. Once they've identified a free washer or dryer, they can check on the progress of their laundry from the comfort of their study bedroom, or perhaps wirelessly in a College bar.

The E-Suds application can be found at: **york-circuit.esuds.net/**

Software Distribution

ADRIAN YOUNG

What is Software Distribution and how does it work?

Software Distribution is the method of installing software applications to supported desktops from a central point without the need to visit individual PCs.

What is involved?

The first step is to create a distributable package, configuring the application to fit with our software policies, eg a shortcut in the Start menu, and making the installation easy for office PCs and invisible for classroom PCs. It allows software to be installed centrally.

Packaging takes the decisions out of the installation process; users don't need to decide where to install software or what settings may be required, and have no need of licence keys, as these are configured during packaging.

Once the application has been packaged and tested, it is ready to be deployed to the supported PCs.

The main deployment tool we use is MS System Management Server (SMS). This uses a server and client technology whereby all supported PCs have the SMS client installed on them which connects to a central SMS server.

The packaged applications are added to the SMS server and adverts are created for different collections of PCs. An advert is the device used by the SMS server to tell the client that a new application is ready to install. A collection can contain one PC or all the supported PCs on campus. We have created several different collections to reflect the different functions the PCs perform or who will be using them. The most common are office and classroom PCs and we advertise to these collections differently.

On classroom PCs the adverts silently install the application without user interaction, usually when no one is logged on. The applications we advertise to the classrooms are mandatory.

The office adverts are not silent; they need a user to be logged on and to choose to perform the install. Applications for office PCs are optional and there is no need to have power user rights to perform the install as this is managed by the SMS client.

What happens when an application is advertised?

SMS client uses a pull technology, which means that every 60 minutes the SMS client checks with the SMS server to see if there is any new software available to install. If there is a new advert for an application, the client pulls the files needed to perform the install.

One advantage of using a pull method is that even if a PC is switched off when the advert is released the SMS client will check for it when it is next turned on.

For adverts to classrooms the application will install when the PC next doesn't have someone logged on.

For adverts to office PCs there will be a "New program available" notification balloon in the system tray. In order to install the new advertised application, simply double click on the balloon and a list of the new applications will appear.

The new applications may also be installed via **Run Advertised Programs** or **Add or Remove Programs**.

Why are some applications only available via Add or Remove Programs?

The other method we use to deploy software is through Active Directory. This method pre-dates the use of SMS and is mostly used for legacy applications that have been around for some time.

Active directory is less flexible than SMS in its deployment methods, so we are moving to deploying software through SMS rather than Active Directory.

Active Directory also uses packaged applications, but they tend to be installed when you log on or when a PC is rebuilt and are usually mandatory installs. They can only be installed from Add or Remove Programs.

What is the future of Software Distribution?

We have also been looking at using Application Virtualisation using MS Softgrid (soon to be called MS Application Virtualization). This is a new approach to software distribution whereby we don't actually install anything on to the PC.

Application Virtualisation still uses client and server architecture but the application is streamed to the PC as and when it is needed.

During the packaging phase the application is created in a self contained "bubble", which contains everything it needs to run. The virtual application doesn't interact with the operating system or other applications so there are no conflicts to contend with. This means we can deploy applications faster as there is no installation process.

We can install multiple versions of applications, so older or newer versions can be made available but won't affect current version installed.

The applications can be delivered to individuals, groups or all supported campus PCs very easily and quickly.

There is centralised management of the applications so we can update to the latest version or apply patches centrally without having to uninstall and redeploy the application to every PC.

Application Virtualisation is currently in the investigation phase but we hope to pilot some applications via Softgrid during the summer 2008 software upgrade programme.

Freezing the Windows 2000 desktop

DAVID SURTEES

The decision has been taken to freeze the supported Windows 2000 desktop from the start of the 2008 Autumn term. A key factor is that many software suppliers no longer produce products suitable for installation on Windows 2000. Users of supported office PCs may now choose to upgrade to Windows XP (see page 6).

Web Redevelopment Project Update

BILL MACKINTOSH

A significant milestone in the Web Redevelopment Project has been reached with the selection of a centrally supported Web Content Management System (CMS).

The software has been purchased from TerminalFour, the company which scored highest in every area of our decision-making process, including the feedback from web authors.

The company has 29 clients in the UK Higher Education sector, including Manchester, St. Andrews and Southampton.

The Web CMS is designed to improve the University's web presence in many ways, including:

- A more professional and high quality site

- More straightforward navigation for users

- Much easier web publishing for web authors in departments, including those who aren't skilled in the use of HTML or Dreamweaver

- A high standard of accessibility

- Strong visual links with our printed materials to reinforce our brand

- Version control may be used to ensure that information published is kept up to date

The software has been installed, and the next stage of the Project is to configure the package for use at York.

Thereafter, the trial migration of four departments to the Web CMS - Chemistry, Psychology, the Library, and the Communications Office will take place. Following this, we will begin a programme of migrating departmental sites to the Web CMS.

For further information about the Web Redevelopment Project, please see **www.york.ac.uk/weboffice/ redevelopment/** or contact Bill Mackintosh, Web Manager.

Upgrading Office PCs to Windows XP

DAVID SURTEES

As reported in previous issues of Keynotes, a Computing Service project is underway to migrate PCs in staff offices to Windows XP.

Newly purchased supported office PCs have been provided with Windows XP as the installed operating system since Autumn 2007 unless users have stated a specific need for Windows 2000. We are now making Windows XP available for users of existing supported office PCs who wish to upgrade from Windows 2000.

The advantages of moving to XP include improved security, and continued access to software upgrades (see page 5).

A number of upgrade options will be available to users, and you are advised to consult your Departmental Computing Officer for further advice. The most time-efficient and cost-effective method for many departments will be for the DCO to carry out the upgrades, and instructions will be made available to enable them to do this. Machines to be upgraded will need to meet a minimum hardware specification; your DCO will have details of this.

Alternatively, the Computing Service can carry out the work - a number of options will be available ranging from a simple set-price upgrade, where no extra memory is required, and the user carries out data backups, to a more complex upgrade involving memory installation and data backup, which will be charged according to the extent of the work involved and the cost of the memory required.

Full details of the available options and the cost structure will be distributed to departments via the DCO mailing list, and an FAQ page is available at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/help/winXP/winXPupgrade.htm**.

Service Desk Implementation Project

JOANNE CASEY

Work is well underway to replace the Enquiry Tracking System with the service desk product, Footprints.

Features of the product include:

- An integrated Knowledge Base

- Facility to set up automated reminders, to identify issues awaiting action.

- Ability to gather statistics, eg on common queries

We are taking this opportunity to evaluate the way that we handle enquiries submitted to us, and will also be carrying out some further user consultation, through University Computing Committee and the DCO mailing list.

We are working towards implementing the new system this summer, and will publish details closer to the date.

Wiki Implementation Project

JOANNE CASEY

Readers may recall that in 2006 the Computing Service undertook to explore the potential use of collaborative technologies within the University. The project's final report recommended that separate projects be set up to implement collaborative facilities.

Pressures on resource have meant that there has been no earlier opportunity to progress this, but we are now pleased to announce that the Wiki Implementation Project has been established to identify the requirements for an institutional Wiki, assess available products against the criteria, and select and implement a suitable product.

The project team has been drawn from the Web Services and Support Services groups within the Computing Service, and the Web Office. Input will also be sought from interested parties within the University.

Computing Service Staff

Director.	Mike Jinks	3801	kmj1
Departmental Administrator.	Lorraine Moor	3801	lsm1
Head of Infrastructure.	Robert Demaine	3808	rld1
Head of Information Systems.	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	kmh8
Head of Support Services.	David Surtees	3803	dps4
Information Officer.	Joanne Casey	3805	jmc8

Kashif Amin	3817	ka14	Anthony Leonard	4350	apbl500
Gavin Atkinson	3738	ga9	Michelle McCarthy	2627	mm533
Amanda Bacon	3802	agb12	Fergus McGlynn	3822	fam6
Sue Bolton	2102	sjb28	Tricia McNamara	3800	pm535
David Broom	3229	dlb10	John Marsden	3832	jpm1
Mike Brudenell	3811	pmb1	John Mason	3813	jrm13
John Byrne	3812	jcb1	Darren Miller	3815	dm26
Arthur Clune	3129	ajc22	Darren Munday	8469	dam6
John Cooper	3595	jmc508	Nicola Normandale	4695	ncn1
Eleanor Coultish	8467	emm502	Dominique Papworth	4348	admp500
Stevie de Saille	3818	smds500	Aimee Phillips	3897	amp11
Steve Downes	3741	sd21	Tamsyn Quormby	4346	tq1
Paul Elliott	3807	pre500	Pritpal Rehal	3597	psr500
Ken Finch	4452	kf1	Sam Scott	3817	svs2
Rob Fletcher	3816	rpf1	Jenny Smailes	4455	jj5
Iain Ford	3894	igf500	Philip Smailes	3833	pjrs1
Kevin Gardner	3739	pkg4	Andrew Smith	3809	abs4
Chris Gowland	3823	cg1	Brian Souter	3814	bs1
Kelvin Hai	4689	kh525	Max Spicer	3745	mjs510
Sarah Hall	3827	seh11	Richard Stoddart	3825	rjs502
Peter Halls	3806	pjh1	Carl Stovell	4699	cjs505
John Hawes	4347	jeh11	Ben Thompson	8401	bt4
Susanne Hodges	3839	sh32	Pete Turnbull	3804	pnt1
Geoff Houlton	2100	gph2	Sam Vines	3749	sccv1
John Hutchinson	3898	jh57	Heather Walker	3743	hp501
John Isles	4454	jdi500	Adrian Young	3820	ary500

Information Desk

The Information Desk is your first point of contact with the Computing Service

t.   01904 43 **3838**

e.   infodesk@york.ac.uk

Open from 09.00 to 17.00 Monday to Friday for problem solving, advice and information, fault reporting, network connections, file restoration, course bookings and user registration.

Contacting the Computing Service

Computing Service
University of York, Heslington
York. YO10 5DD

t.   01904 43 **3800**

dd. 01904 43 followed by ext nos
      beginning **2, 3 or 4.**
      01904 32 followed by ext nos
      beginning **8.**

f.   01904 43 **3740**

e.   username@york.ac.uk

w.   **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/**

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