

Editorial

John Mitchell

One of the few bonuses of doing this job is that I get the occasional opportunity to rant about some of the stupid things that I find when going about my everyday business. Now one of the reasons I became an auditor was because I liked the apparent power without responsibility advantage that it conceded on me. I soon learnt that this was not the true situation, but it did give me access to senior people who would give me the courtesy of a hearing, even if they did not subsequently do anything about the problem I had identified.

Editorship gives a similar illusion of power without responsibility, but again one has to take one's responsibility seriously, so before ranting off I always give the other party the opportunity to respond to whatever I am going to write. In this case the cause of my rant was (notice the past tense) the Standard Life Assurance Company. A few months ago I registered for their on-line service so that I could track the depreciation in my pension policy. They require, amongst other data, my national insurance number. I enter it in the very format that is printed on the pension document provided to me by Standard Life 'AA NN NN NN', but it is rejected. I try again with the same result. I then guess that it should be AANNNNNN and it is accepted. Hooray! Spoke to soon. The next box to pop up states that this is my registration number and I should write it down as it is the only future way to access my details. There is no method of saving the details to my computer, so I am forced to write it down on an insecure piece of paper. The number is 10 digits long! I am then asked to select a pin number. This is only 4 digits long and as I can choose my own I do not need to write it down. I am then offered the opportunity to tailor my own site. Yes please. However, first I must register again!

Okay, in for a penny and off I go, but this registration is different. The identifier is my email address and I can choose any password that I like. This is good, because I can use my normal mix of alpha numerics and can make it longer than 4 digits. So, we have the same company with apparently 2 different sites designed by different people. The really important one, the one with my pension details requires me to write down a 10 digit number, but only requires a 4 digit password. The second site uses my email address, which is in the public domain, but allows me to choose a strong password. Crazy. I try to find someone to discuss these matters with. Tricky. I can talk to all sorts of people about products, they are listed on the site, but no-where is there any direct link to a webmaster, or technical support.

I try a thing called a user guide and find a number for technical problems. Now I have a design problem, not a technical problem, but no-one else seems to fit the bill so I call technical support (not a free number) and talk to a chap whose name I will withhold. He points out very firmly, bordering on the insulting, that my problem is not technical. I agree with him and he suggests that as I have

registered a pension I should speak to the pension's help desk. He kindly puts me through, or rather I get stirring music for 10 minutes.

I then talk to another person who is polite and explains that the first 6 digits of the pension registration number are my date of birth, therefore I only need to remember the last 4. Goodness, this is worse than I thought. Loads of people know my date of birth, so Standard Life's security over its customer data depends on a 4 digit identifier and a 4 digit password. Nought out of ten for security. I can see that their security people have never heard of CISSP. I insist on a written response. He asks whether an acknowledgement of my concern is sufficient. I respond that I want a detailed answer to my points. He wriggles, but eventually agrees to email me something.

A few days later I received the following response which I print in full because it is a fine example of excellent customer relations. *'I am responding to the comments made to one of my colleagues regarding the frustrations you encountered registering for services on our website today.*

Firstly, we appreciate all customer feedback and really do listen to what customers have to say which in some cases can help us identify new improvements, or as in the case of online registration can help ratify the changes we are already making.

Concerning the difficulty with the NI number, this is being removed from our new security system which is being designed. Indeed, when it was originally built it was probably an oversight into how to accept entries into this field i.e. accepting all characters in one go, rather than spaced out as presented on a NI card.

As I've just mentioned, we are creating a new system which has been in development now for 18 months and is due to go live before June this year. This will rectify the issues you encountered with the User ID and PIN. With the new system you will be given a User ID and temporary password when you register (the password being issued to you via the post). Once you login to the system you will be able to change both User ID and password on your first access.

As you will be an existing registered user, your existing PIN will have to be replaced by a new password, however you will also have the opportunity to change your User ID at that point.

Finally, concerning the fact that you had to re-register for My Site. I fully agree with the comments made. We are looking into this issue with a view to ensuring that our customers can have only one User ID and password for both areas that contain sensitive information (i.e. about your policy) and areas which contain non-sensitive data e.g. subscribing to email alerts

on My Site. This work we are prioritising, but it is being addressed and I will ensure that I raise your views with colleagues so that we can raise the urgency of delivering this to our customers.

My only worry is that did I get this response because I mentioned that I was a technology journalist? I hope not.

Neither was I surprised when I, along with the entire population, was unable to register on-line my newly acquired Sainsbury's Nectar card. The reason that I was not surprised is because I have had problems with the user interface of their store website for years. Try using their store locator. You have to get things just right, No fuzzy logic here. No automatic conversion of lower case into the appropriate upper equivalent. As a search engine it makes the deciphering of the Rosetta stone look like kindergarten work. An example. A few years ago they opened a new store in a village called London Colney which is about 6 miles from where I live. The search engine gives you four options: a post code, a town, a London district, or a county. I enter my postcode and 6 'local' stores are listed. None of them the one that I am looking for and some of them further afield. I try entering a town. The nearest town to the store that I am looking for is Saint Albans. No, don't try that spelling it doesn't work. How about 'St Albans'. No that doesn't work either. Neither do lower case equivalents. I cracked it in the end. After 30 minutes of frustration I eventually entered 'St. Albans'. Notice the period after the 'St'? It's absolutely essential to finding the store. Still, a result. Not really. I wanted to check the Christmas opening times. They were wrong! This was two years ago. Yes, I complained. Yes it would be fixed, But it still isn't. I checked it just a moment ago. They still require that period. Thank goodness that Google and Enfish aren't so fussy, otherwise I would never find anything.

Still enough of my ranting, but I do feel better! Onto the content of this edition. We have a real heavyweight article from Viacheslav Katok on using mathematical modelling techniques to optimally allocate your audit staff, the official BCS response to the Government's consultation paper on entitlement (read identification) cards, a piece from Bob Ashton dealing with recruitment within an ISO 17799 context, reports from Rupert Kendrick on our last two events, some examples of the Nigerian 419 scam and a humour page which is aimed at getting you to write better audit reports.

AND FINALLY The AGM is scheduled for the 13th May. We are **desperately** in need of volunteers for the Management Committee. We are losing our Chairman and Treasurer and need help in organising events. We are the oldest specialist group in the BCS. We are also one of the largest and we have substantial financial reserves, but this will all count for nothing if we can't get enough people to manage it. There is a real danger that the Group will fold unless we receive help. Please do your bit by putting in a little effort. You will find an application form with this edition.

