

The Aspect Diary



Scam phone calls just keep on coming, don't they? Recorded messages from "BT" to say our internet is about to be cut off. "Microsoft" telling us we have viruses. "HMRC" telling us a warrant has been issued for our arrest over unpaid taxes. We read online that someone who was duped by the HMRC one was subsequently told by the scammers that he should purchase iTunes vouchers to the value of the unpaid tax amount & give them the voucher codes when they rang back. I mean, really? Did it really seem likely that HMRC would ask to be paid in iTunes vouchers?!!!! Perhaps they'd let us pay our Corporation Tax with a *Game of Thrones* box set....

We had to send a parcel by Royal Mail recently, which we do occasionally, but this time we needed it there pre-1pm. Their guaranteed service statement? "We guarantee to try & deliver before 1pm". Guaranteeing to try?? Isn't that the UK's Eurovision motto?

As we've mentioned, we've gone a bit leased line crazy lately & we have to say that when delays have been encountered on our various orders (& boy, have they ever) it's proved to have a jargon all its own. We've had test rods being pushed out. We've had backlogs of hydra cables. We've had ELF issues (we always wondered what they did after the Xmas rush was over. Who knew they worked for Open Reach?) Plus we've had both underground & overground issues on one order (& there's clearly never a Womble around when you need one).

We rang a tech support line the other day. It's for a big enough company, fully-staffed support dept & all that. So we're greeted by "your call is at queue position 3". Quickly followed by "your call is at queue position 2". Excellent! Except 20 mins later, we're still at queue position 2, only they seemed to have introduced an extra *announcing-the-X-Factor-results* pause ie. "your call is at queue position wait for it, wait for it 2". An hour in & we're still at 2. Now these calls do NOT take that long. It's impossible to be 2nd in the queue for a solid hour. Why don't they just say "your call is at position 46 but we don't want to discourage you" ?

As we bring this issue to a close & contemplate starting the Autumn issue, may we rally the troops & issue what the Americans call a BOLO (be on the lookout)? We're looking for summer. It was spotted all over the place last year at around this time & hung about for quite a while. It's possible it's simply taken up residence on one of the Costas instead, like a fugitive Great Train robber. If so, can someone start extradition proceedings please? Thank you.

The Last Laugh



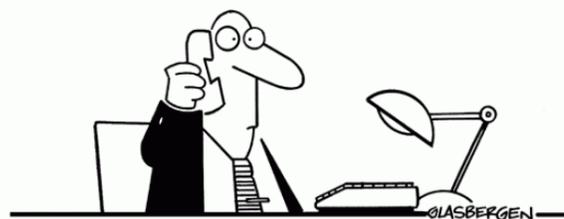
"We forgot to back up our files, so we're asking everyone to remember everything they've typed during the past 10 days."



"I had a terrible seat at the concert. I was sitting directly behind my iPhone."



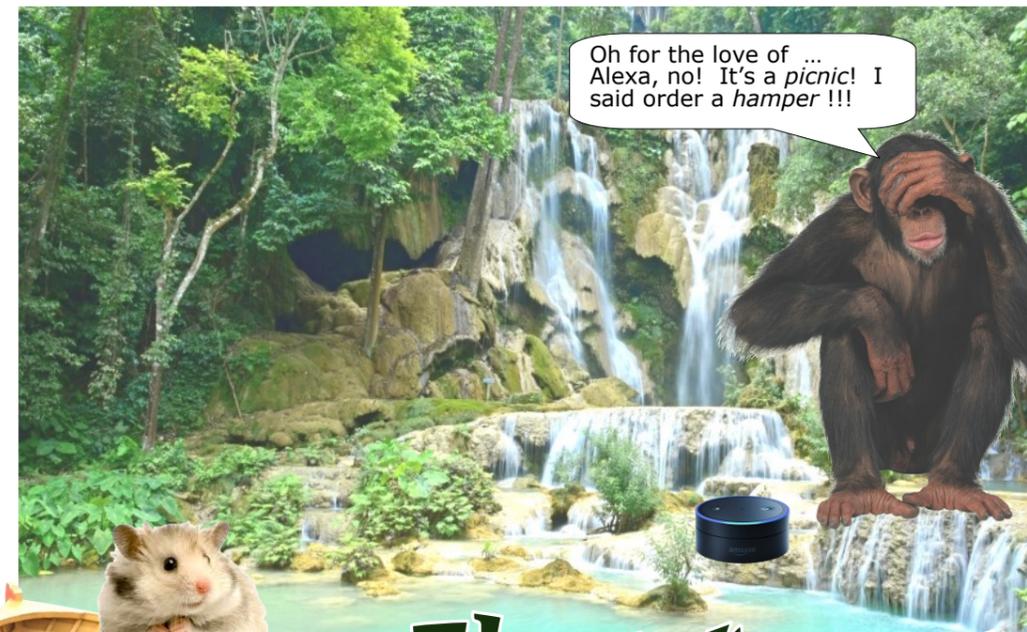
We debated the timing of this cartoon, but hey, it's not like any of you are flying anytime soon, eh? ☺



"Thank you for calling Creative Business Seminars. If you'd like to become a more creative problem solver, press 1 without touching any part of your telephone."

The Aspect Newsletter

Issue 43 - Summer 2019



The Internet of Things

Ah, voice recognition. Great, isn't it? We have an Alexa at home, as do our neighbours. Summertime on the patio, and they shout to theirs to play Jess Glynne. Ours pipes up helpfully with "here's a selection from J S Bach" and launches into the *Brandenburg Concertos*. And that's ignoring all the times it chimes in when nobody's talking to it at all, or you ask it to play a piece of music it doesn't recognise, so it recites the American Football results instead. If ours was in any way cognitive, by now it must think its name is "Alexa Stop". But there - if you're one of those people who wants to control their heating or turn on the washing machine from their phone while at work, then the Internet of Things (IoT) is right up your alley. On the spectrum of mistrust, I myself hover somewhere between the middle and the tinfoil helmet end.

Welcome to summer, *chez Aspect*. Habitually, at this time of year, we implore clients to please refrain from sending us snapshots of the view from their hotel balcony / beach hammock / poolside sunbed, because strange as it may seem, the sight of all that sunshine does not engender feelings of warmth in us back here.** But since we started getting such photos in April this year (*April!!!*) we realise that in terms of futility, it's up there with holding back the tide. Or negotiating Brexit So yes, keep your photos; we'll make do with the foreign views in our Quiz, thank you.

**Be nice if *something* engendered some warmth sometime soon, though. We still have the heating on ☹.



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Aspect BC FAQs

My wireless mouse isn't working. I've tried changing the batteries.



There is something else you could try. There's usually a little USB receiver that plugs into your computer/laptop. Try removing that and then plugging it back in again. You never know.

I have a mouse problem too. It's gone nuts! I'm not even clicking, and it's zooming about!

You probably clicked the wheel on the mouse. Did you know you could click it as well as roll it? Clicking it will briefly show you a four-arrowed symbol, but now if you slide the mouse in any direction, it will head that way ... and keep going at a rate of knots. Click the wheel again to turn it back to 'normal' mode.



I'm getting lots of pop-up notifications in Google Chrome - is there any way to make them go away?

Yes, though we have to say that Chrome does a remarkably good job of hiding where exactly you do it.

When you have Chrome open, click on the three vertical dots on the top right and choose [Settings](#) from the menu. Scroll to the bottom and click [Advanced](#). In the first section - [Privacy and security](#) - choose [Site settings](#) and then set the [Pop-ups and redirects](#) to [Blocked](#).



We'd love to hear your comments and feedback.
Just email:
newsletter@aspectbc.co.uk

(Recent issues are on the website if you missed them).

Have you planned for January 2020?

Why, you ask? Is that when Brexit's happening? To which we reply, don't be so silly. Nobody knows when Brexit's happening....

No, but as 2019 trundles on, we feel compelled to bore you with yet another reminder of the Damoclean sword that hangs over us all, ready to drop in January 2020.

Windows 7, as you all know by now (yes you do, we've told you many times and Microsoft have likely started sending you pop-ups to remind you), needs to go.

Windows Server 2008 Standard needs to go.

And **Windows Small Business Server 2011** needs to go. This is because it's basically Server 2008, with Exchange tacked on.

Be sure to make your plans in plenty of time.



And if you're going to move your mail ...

Following on (vaguely) from the above article, we know many clients are choosing to take their emails into the Cloud, rather than opting for - what is now - the rather expensive option of replacing their old Exchange server with a new Exchange server.

One thing though, if you choose to do this - do you have an SPF record on your domain? If you recall from previous newsletters, an SPF record is something you use to specify where *real* emails from your organisation should come from. The idea is to stop people pretending to be you (ie. email spoofing). Not all mail servers bother to check SPF records, but those that do, and many spam filtering engines, will look at the SPF record for any incoming mail and judge whether it's being sent from where it *ought* to be. And if you moved your emails into the Cloud but didn't get the SPF record changed to reflect that, the receiving server is going to say "nope, don't believe you're you, go away."



What's at the (modern) heart of IT support?

Here's a question. What is IT Support *for*? (No, we're not having an existential crisis. While we probably wouldn't mind leaving the rat race, we'd like a Euro Millions win behind us first, so it's safe to say you're stuck with us for now).

Once upon a time, the biggest threats to business continuity would have been fire, theft and hardware (server) failure. Fire and theft are still a given, but as hardware has become much more reliable, it's *security* that's come much more to the fore. Think GDPR, think ransomware, think disaster recovery. Whatever other IT Support services you may use, there's a number of fundamental things you *must* have covered:

- Email anti-virus and anti-spam
- Desktop anti-virus
- Web browsing and phishing protection
- Backup/disaster recovery/business continuity
- Router/firewall configuration and firmware upgrades
- Security updates and patching for servers and workstations



With this in mind, we're re-jigging our support offerings so that this becomes the core of them all. We can do plenty else, but we reckon that if there's one thing you really ought to have us do for you, it's this.

So prepare to be contacted (*trans*: be afraid; be very afraid) We've been a bit slower to review our support contracts than we'd like, but with so many of you having to change your hardware this year for newer stuff (oh, don't give us the shocked surprise. Read page 2. Or *any* of the recent newsletters), it's the ideal time to steer you in a different, *better* direction.

Aspect go Rallying!

We did mention last time that we'd had an unprecedented flurry on leased line orders. As luck would have it, the provider we use (KCOM) was running a competition at the time - a points-based system called Fastest 4, based on how many orders for fibre broadband and leased lines we placed (being in ascending order of points value). Prize was a place on a rally day. Well we placed so many orders, we won not one, but TWO places on the rally day. Go us!

Since neither Nikki nor I is exactly Sabine Schmitz (and the 'kats can't reach the pedals, whatever Vassilly claims), we gallantly offered to let Mike and Steve take up the places. Well truth is, it was that or watch two grown men throw their teddies out of the pram. And when we found out the deal they'd be on included dinner and an overnight stay in a luxury spa hotel, well, we accepted that with quiet good grace. (Good job you can't see my face as I type that. We did attempt some payback when we were asked about their dietary requirements - we said they were both on low-carb, 500-calorie per day diets. Yes, OK, we did admit we were fibbing. Eventually, anyway).

Unfortunately, at the last minute Mike couldn't make it, so it was just Steve spending the day racketing about the Gloucestershire countryside doing rallying, off-road 4x4 driving and archery. He'll be the first to admit he didn't exactly give The Stig anything to worry about on the track, and did spin off a couple of times. He was better at channelling William Tell and scored well on the archery. Didn't hit the apple though. (No, it wasn't on anyone's head).



Thanks to KCOM for a great day out. They run the Fastest 4 competition every year, so here's hoping we can win again next time.



Jargon Buster #32 - Leased Lines

As we mentioned last time, leased lines seem to be very much on topic at present. But in case you weren't sure what one is pull up a chair and we'll explain.

With an ordinary broadband connection (be it ADSL or fibre), you share the line with other people. Standard **contention ratios** (as they're called) used to be around 20:1 for businesses and 50:1 for households, but those aren't completely accurate these days. In principle though, at any given time you're going to be sharing the line with other people, and if you all want to use it at the same time, you may find your speeds deteriorating. And of course, there's the chance they were never all that great to begin with. Fibre is obviously better than ADSL and has greater capacity, so more people are able to share it without the same inconvenience.

With a leased line though, it's all yours, over its entire length, and all the bandwidth you purchase will be delivered for your personal delectation, no sharesies (ie. a contention ratio of 1:1). They are also **symmetric**, meaning the upload and download speeds are the same. They're more reliable too, and if anything should go wrong with them, they're subject to guaranteed fix times.

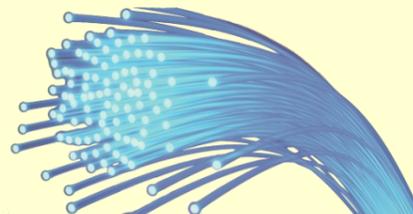
This all means that leased lines are much more expensive than ADSL or fibre, naturally, and you need to expect three-figure sums per month, depending on how much bandwidth you want (typically 10Mb to 100Mb currently), and what speed you want the bearer line to have (either 100Mb or 1Gb). On a 3-year contract, set up charges are usually waived, where they wouldn't be on a 1-year contract (and would run to four figures). But it's all still subject to site survey and it might need a lot of additional construction work to get the new circuit routed to you. At the time of writing, we've noted that Open Reach are covering £2,800 of those additional costs, where they apply, but we have seen these costs be nothing, a few hundred pounds or be in five figures.

They also take a lot longer to install. Where ADSL should take about a week, and fibre about a fortnight (hey, we said 'should' - don't bring us your horror stories. We've got plenty of our own, thank you very much), leased lines would typically be looking at around three months. Maybe less. But maybe hugely longer.

Bear in mind too that if you relocate, you can't take it with you. It's a very precise circuit, brought to your doorstep.

All that considered, is it worth it? Well, as we said last time, if internet access, or inter-office connectivity is critical to you, then yes, absolutely.

(The illustration is meant to be fibre optic cables, honest, not some Dr Who monster).



"Spot the City" Quiz

Being a cosmopolitan bunch, we reckon you can probably spot landmarks from various cities at 1,000 paces. But luckily for you, we're not asking you to do that. We're asking you to identify them at normal reading distance.

Below, we have some (mostly!) well-known pictures of landmarks in cities around the world, in two groups. We want you to take the first letter of the **city** in question and put it into the relevant grid. The two grids will then spell out two more cities. The first one is fairly easy; the second well, we have faith in you!

Answers on the website - follow the link from the newsletter page.



City 1:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---



City 2:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Don't take a chance. Take a backup.

May we just take a moment to stress again the importance of backups? Having seen a client lose their premises in a catastrophic fire recently, we don't think we can ever shout too loudly about how much backups matter.

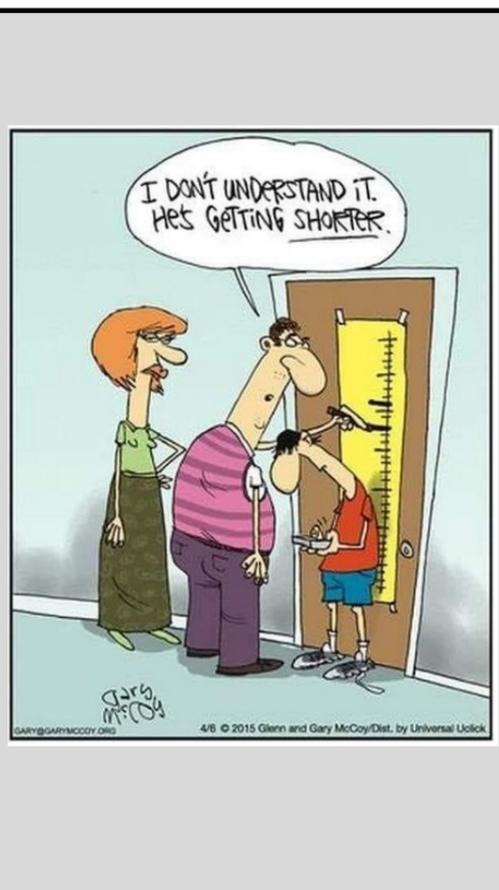
If your broadband is up to it, we'd recommend you go for a Cloud backup. It'll happen overnight whether you remember about it or not, and it's always physically stored somewhere else compared to your live data. That ticks all the boxes.

If you're taking care of your own backups, that's fine. Just remember to rotate the tapes/disks/drives, and take the most recent one home (or keep it in a fire-proof safe).

Remember as well - any backup routine for your site will almost certainly just be for the file server. If you're keeping important stuff on your PC well frankly, you shouldn't be. If it matters to the company, it should be on the server where it can be backed up. If it matters to you *personally*, then you should be backing it up yourself.

You should also test your backups periodically. We have heard of people who changed their disks diligently every night, but when push came to shove, they discovered there was nothing actually on any of them.

Our client was lucky. But ask yourself - if it happened to your business, would you be?



Why pay more for broadband?



Following on from our piece in the last issue about our reduced broadband pricing, we find ourselves bemused listening to TV

and radio adverts for the 'big' names and their broadband services. "We guarantee not to raise prices during the term of your contract". Well yes. Isn't that how a C-O-N-T-R-A-C-T is supposed to work? We can't believe it needs saying, but clearly they consider it a selling point, which must only mean that a sudden price hike mid-term isn't unusual.

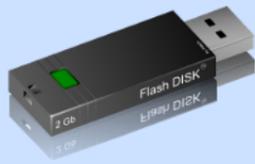
(We're also bemused by "no activation fees". Again, for us, that would be 'well duh').

For the record, we don't ever increase our broadband pricing while customers are in contract. We don't put the prices up when they're out of contract. In fact, all we've ever done is reduce pricing where we can.

Some companies might like to screw you for as much money as possible while they've got you. Not us.

Is it safe?

Safely removing a USB device used to mean clicking on it down on the task bar and waiting till Windows told you that you could. But not any more.



With update 1809 of Windows 10, which came out in October of 2018 (but obviously takes a while to permeate the world), Microsoft changed the default setting for removing USB devices to "quick removal", so now you can just take a flash drive out with no harm to the data. Unless it's actually still copying when you unplug, of course.

Vassilly's Blog

Thurs 4 April

Payrolls lady is get new accounting softwares. Maybe I am wrong, peoples, but I am always think is made up of Sales and Purchasings and Invoicings and things. But no. If I am understand correctly from what Payrolls lady is say, this one is made up of &*!!@!, also %^*!!@ and !@#\$!%!!.

Fri 12 April

Telecommms Boss Man is have another job in that restaurant where staff is think I am rat and is throw things at me. He is ask if I am want to come. Oooh, let me think. No. In other news, Payrolls lady is give up on new accounting softwares and is happy smiley again.

Thurs 18 April

Sun is shine, week is short, and I am being given own body weight in chocolate eggs. Life is good, loyal fans.

Thurs 25 April

Is winter again. Nikki is go for usual lunchtime walk to park when is start to rain. And then is start to hail. Sideways. When she is get back, and water is drip off hair, chin and even eyelashes, I am make helpful observation that when I am being wet, I am just give two shakes, and I am dry. Peoples! She is pick me up and shake me! I say I am not wet!!! She say no, but is make her feel better.

Tues 7 May

Aspects is have new van. Is bit smaller than other van and I am able to get in without winch. IT Boss Man say we is use big van for big jobs and littler van for littler jobs. Or-rrrrr, I am suggest maybe big van is for big peoples to drive and littler van is for littler peoples to drive? When Payrolls lady is able to speak again, she say I am never tell her I am have licence for drivings. I say she is never ask. She say is it full UK licence? I say not *exactly*. She say is it *half*UK licence? No-o, is more like provisional Meerkovo licence. She is ask if I am ever pass test. Pass ... no. She is ask if I am ever *sit* test. Well, I am *arrive* for test, yes. Is problem with shortage of examiners though. Lady at desk say everyone is good until they is get list for the day. Then one is feel sick, two is remember granny's funeral and last one is remember important appointment. She say he is very late for it too, because he is climb out first floor window so not to waste time on stairs. Week after, I am coming to Wales, but I am still mustard-keens to try again.

Wed 15 May

Telecommms Boss Man is off to Tuscany. Then in Nov, he is go to Thailand. IT Boss Man is spend weekend in Tenby. Are you spot the trend here, peoples? Yes, exactly!!! Telecommms Boss Man is go exciting places and IT Boss Man is not.

Thurs 23 May

OK, OK, I am tell lie. IT Boss Man and Payrolls lady is off to Bordeaux. Everyone at Aspects is try to look surprised that she is aim for somewhere with wine. We are ask if she is plan to bring any back. IT Boss Man say better question is if she is plan to leave any behind.

Tues 28 May

Apparently holiday is OK, but she is not bring any wine back. (Is she sick?) IT Boss Man is get searched at airport on way out, and passport is not work on way back in. (He is think maybe he is have passport with biometrics for someone else. It is not work *anywhere*. He is being stopped in so many airport, he is worry he is on Interpol watch list). Meanwhile, I am giving much thoughts to holidays too. Is difficult, because I am being on no-fly lists, no-train lists and some no-bus lists. I am do staycation in roasting hot summer last year, but summer is not turn up yet in Wales. Payrolls lady say Scotland is nice, and also cheap to get to. She say is only £10!! Really? She say yes, and is show me prices Wait a minute. These is for next day parcel deliveries!! She say not to be worrying - she is punch holes in box first. You know, peoples, if I am not know that she is funny person, I am maybe think she is not like me.

Thurs 6 June

IT Boss Man is have jolly day out today. He is go to race cars and shoot things. (And I am let you into secret, peoples. I think he is have soft spot for me after all!! I am find big picture of me on his desk last night!! Is bit funny though, because he is draw all over it with circles inside circles, right down to little circle over my chest. But still! He is want to have picture of me, and that is nice, yes?)



The Helpdesk of HORROR ...

Still expecting us to run out? Nope. It's like Willy Wonka's Everlasting Gobstopper. It'll carry on forever!



"Uh ... yeah, I called this morning because my computer wasn't working?"

"Yes, that's right. I came up and swapped out your monitor. Is everything working now?"

"Well yes, but I just thought you'd fix it, not replace it."

"It was completely dead, and it's not something that we can repair. It was easiest just to replace it."

"Oh. Did you try turning it off and on again?"

"I think that's my line."

"Thank you for calling tech support, how can I help you?"

"My forward and back buttons on Internet Explorer are greyed out."

"So you were web surfing and you want to go back to the previous page, but it's disabled?"

"Well no ... I just opened Internet Explorer and noticed they were greyed out."

"So there isn't actually a previous page for it to go back to?"

"Uhhh ... no, I guess not."

"Thank you for calling [Company] - may I have your surname please?"

"Brown."

"And your first name?"

"Where would I find that?"

"... Your driving licence??"

"Right, press the green button on the screen, and then choose the option that says 'Next.'"

"It just says 'Back' or 'Cancel!'"

"Did you press the green button?"

"No, I pressed the blue button."

"Yeah, see that's the trouble with pressing the blue button. You don't get the green button's options..."

"Okay, can you type your password and press enter?"

"... It says password incorrect."

"Can you read out exactly what you typed?"

"A-f-5-d-7-H-D-p-r-e-s-s-e-n-t-e-r."

"Yeah, I didn't pay my internet bill and you suspended my account, and I want to know why!!!!"

"My internet isn't working. Can you connect to my PC and see what's wrong?"

"Well ... no. We connect across the internet. If you don't have internet, I can't connect."

"Really? I thought you just ... I dunno ... beamed in."

"Thank you for calling tech support, how can I help?"

"What kind of accent is that? Where am I calling?"

"I'm in Canada, sir. Now how can I help?"

"Canada?! You actually have internet in Canada?"

"Nope, just got radio. In fact I had to drive my dog sled into work. There was a horrible accident and I lost two dogs. It's been a rough day."

"I knew it! I want internet support from a country that actually has it!" [Click]

"OK, so we're going to carry on with this installation, so for the next 5 or 6 screens, just keep pressing Next.."

"Okay... so do I hit Next or Back?"

"Next. It's 'Next' for the following 5 pages."

"Uh-huh ... I clicked Next. OK, got a new page .. do I hit Next or Back?"

"Next! Just keep pressing Next!!"

"Right ... right ... OK, got another page now. Is it Next or Back?"

[thoroughly fed up by now]

"Click Back."

"OK... now Next or Back?"

"Next."

"OK ... Next or Back?"

"Click Back."

"I think it's broken - it keeps looping through the same pages."

"I bought a computer from you but the internet isn't working."

"... uh, the computer itself seems to be operating just fine. Who is your ISP?"

"My what?"

"Your ISP. Internet Service Provider. Who provides your internet?"

"I don't have one yet. I wanted to sign up on the internet ..."

"My boss has a problem with his PC, so he said I should call you. He said you would ask me some questions."

"OK. What problem does he have?"

"I don't know."

"O-kaacy. Did he maybe mention what questions I might ask?"

"No."

"So, click on Start and choose Control Panel ... now you want to choose the option for Internet Options."

"I'm trying what you say but it's not doing anything."

[after 10 mins more of 'try this' ... I'm trying but it's not doing anything]...

"We're going to have to do a reboot."

"How do I do that?"

"From the Start menu, choose Restart."

"Where do I find Start?"

"Like before? When you went into Control Panel?"

"Oh. I mean ... I didn't. I haven't pressed anything... I wasn't sure what you were asking me to do."