

## Getting off the web...

*Most companies and indeed individuals are struggling to get on the web with their corporate site or their individual blog but one person found it rather difficult to get away from the internet.*



It started in the Xmas holidays of 2000. I was younger then and bored and felt like doing something on the net. I had learned how to use Front Page and had written a few very garish web pages and managed to upload them and decided to become a web millionaire. My chosen route was to write a website for the town I lived in.

Research showed that there were only 4 businesses in my town with a web presence so I set about developing Mirfield.net. First stage was to buy the domain name. Only £100 (yes I know it's cheaper now but we are talking medieaval in terms of the net).

The site prospered, a friend joined me and we did sell a bit of space and made a profit of £120 which we blew on a corporate Xmas dinner for ourselves and our wives at a local restaurant.

In 2004 things went sour. My partner and his wife split up, he moved away, I lost access to the server where the data was stored and Mirfield NET went into decline. I saw with grim satisfaction that the domain name was due to expire at the end of 2004 so I sat back and waited for it all to disappear with a whimper. I had started to receive all types of junk to Mirfield Net's various addresses – [sales@mirfield.net](mailto:sales@mirfield.net), [info@mirfield.net](mailto:info@mirfield.net), [subscribe@mirfield.net](mailto:subscribe@mirfield.net) which my colleague had set up. The robots had discovered the site and the volume of junk was getting serious.

I was looking forward to no longer having Mirfield NET around in 2005. Christmas came and went and in the world of Mirfield NET nothing happened! The site was still there, the emails were still arriving. The site wasn't disappearing into cyberlimbo but was still active. I set up a few rules to deal with the junk email and waited for it to finally go. Except it didn't.

I contacted the organisation that sold me the domain name in the first place and they invited me to log in to my account and change anything I wanted. I'd lost the details by now and even when they emailed them to me I couldn't make anything happen. I received numerous automated messages from their help desk but no-one actually did what I wanted and deleted the domain name.

Eventually I was sent through to accounts who informed me that I owed them money! When I didn't renew the domain name at the end of 2004 they renewed it for me and charged me another £40. They couldn't delete the domain as I owed them money. They had no consent from me for this renewal but refused to let this small matter get in the way of reimbursement. No arguments worked – I was stuck.

One day I decided to pay the bill and request deletion of the domain. They cashed the cheque and guess what...

I rang up and asked why. Eventually a nice young man called Gavin said they couldn't delete the domain until they'd checked my signature. God knows why – they didn't need a signature to sell it to me or to renew it without my consent. I pointed this out but Gavin wouldn't budge so I faxed him my signature in early November and he promised action within 24 hours. At last something was happening.

A week later the site was still there, the emails were still arriving so I phoned again. This time Gavin explained that I needed to identify myself to them before they'd actually de-tag the domain (must be getting close now – the buggers are starting to talk technical). More protestations from me but one Friday I faxed a photocopy of my passport!

You can guess the next line.



November 23rd and I wrote a letter to the chief executive. They wouldn't let me talk to him on the phone so I addressed the letter to the CX and marked it Addressee only. I outlined my grievance and asked for him to sort it out.

As the final line in my letter I asked to be supplied with a copy of their support desk record of my business relationship with them. I pointed out that this was a request under that Data Protection Act as they hadn't been very clued in up to now.

Early December and another call to the support desk finally produced Charlie who told me that he could delete the domain for me and miraculously it has now disappeared. Unfortunately Charlie also said that he didn't have a copy of my request for subject access and intimated that it had got lost.

3rd of January was day 40 of 40 allowed by the Act for a response. I ring up to check on progress and am invited to fax a copy of my request to the organisation. They don't have a dedicated Data Protection Officer. Help desk does DP. Fax sent 11<sup>th</sup> January.

Time passed. On day 88 the Helpdesk manager received the case. He telephoned me to ask what I actually wanted. After a few telephone calls he instructed someone to send

me what I asked for. Day 90 it arrived. No apologies for their actions prior to my subject access request – the renewal without consent, the insistence on top level id to delete a domain etc – and no recognition that they failed to respond within a deadline required by law.

Would you like to be this organisation? Would you be seriously embarrassed if this was how you responded to an individual asking for a simple service and a subject access request? Not wanting to namecity and shamecity I won't actually tell you which organisation took so long to respond.

The letter to the Information Commissioner is being prepared.