

Crossing the Digital Divide (v143)

Easier than taxes

by Joseph Feigon for the Observer

Spent last weekend in Big Sur celebrating one of my siblings birthday, had a great time enjoying the rain, and “suffered” through a new book, in part, because Deetjen’s Big Sur Inn lacks broadband connectivity. In fact, other than a couple mile stretch on 101 close to the town of Big Sur, there was no cell or cellular data service from Carmel Highlands to Esalen (didn’t head further south).

I can live without constantly being tethered to the Net, but the flood of email the minute I’m back “on-grid” always leaves me anxious, for a few minutes, worrying that something happened and I wasn’t able to answer the phone or provide a simple fix via email.

It’s now officially tax season – being married to a bookkeeper, and having several clients in the financial service business, I know things can get tense when a computer (or printer) fails. Last week, my wife’s remote application server (a PC in a closet) decided to call it quits, with year-end billings awaiting invoicing and cover letters. With minor exception, replacing this unit was fairly painless – a few hours of updates and application re-installation, an hour on the phone with tech support for her trade-specific billing utility, Teamviewer for remote access, and firewall modifications so that she can print to a remote office with one of those huge, multi-tray monsters that will do everything but cook dinner.

The other client is a bookkeeper with far more clients than my wife, all of which she manages tax returns for, many for whom she does payroll. Okay, Quickbooks migration is easy, but ProSeries (an Intuit application for tax return generation) demands step-by-step migration of previous year tax data. The client has been using Quickbooks and ProSeries since 2009.

Basic machine setup includes software updates, installation of Chrome, Adobe, Teamviewer, Thunderbird, an Office suite (Libre Office, OpenOffice, MS Office...), more updates, printer assignments, backup setup, backup validation, miscellaneous tools, cable cleanup, and some documentation. I spent the better part of a full day with this client, she was busy doing taxes later that evening while I did the 280 commute north during rush hour. Life without remote access usually means way too much stop/go traffic.

Take away this week: keep your devices up-to-date (anything that connects to the Internet), and please, make sure you’re backing up files you don’t want to lose. Consider changing your email/bank/brokerage/amazon/whomever passwords, especially if you haven’t done so for over a year. For good password information, visit this site:

<https://www.baekdal.com/thoughts/password-security-usability/>

Control those things you can, and keep the surprises to a minimum.