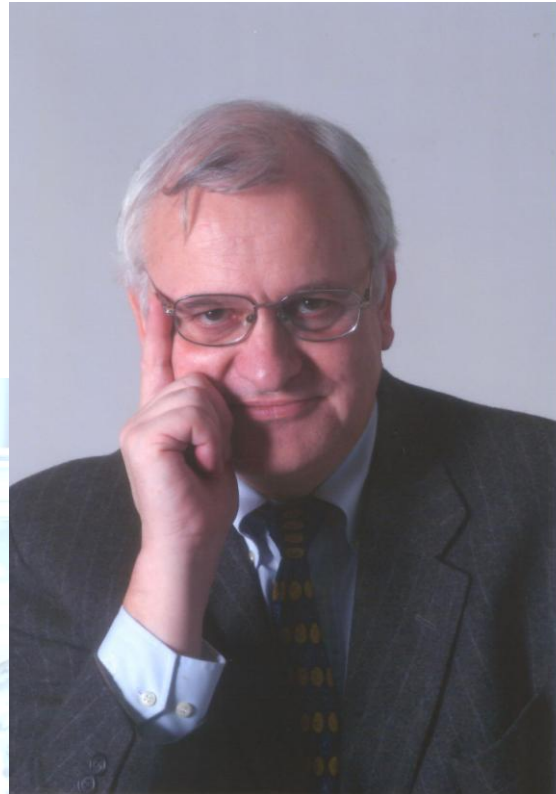


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## **ITMatters**

In this regular column Charles Zealey of ITSolve covers all aspects of business and personal computing. If you have a question about IT matters, email it to Charles on [itmatters@itsolve.co.uk](mailto:itmatters@itsolve.co.uk)



### **Is it Encrypted?**

It seems as if it happens almost every week now. There is an announcement of the loss of a CD, or a memory stick, or a laptop PC. There follows a long discussion about the nature of the information stored and whether or not it was encrypted. Despite all this publicity the fact is that most of us pay little or no attention to the way in which our data is stored or transmitted.

### **Why bother?**

The fact is that most information stored on computer disks, or transmitted across the internet is stored or sent in plain text. This means that if it can be intercepted it can be read. So the information stored on a lost memory stick, or the stolen PC, is available to anyone who has access to it. The information could include anything that you choose to store on a computer disk, or to send by email, or enter into a web page. Would you be happy to share the information on your computer system with the person who finds your memory stick in the car park? Or with the person who has broken into your office and stolen your computer? Or with the person who is sent an email by mistake? Almost certainly not.

### **So, what do I need to do?**

The way to reduce the chance of our information security being compromised is to use encryption. We are already familiar with this. When a yellow padlock appears in your browser, perhaps when you are doing your internet banking, the information you are sending is being encrypted so it cannot be compromised during transmission.

Encryption uses a password or pass-phrase to convert the information into a form which is un-intelligible to a human reader, and which cannot be decoded except by someone with the original password or pass-phrase, or something derived from it.

Encryption can be applied to complete computer disks, to individual files, or to email depending on your requirements.

## **That sounds hard....**

If you take this seriously and want to move forward, understanding those requirements is the best starting point. You will then need to work out what information needs to be encrypted and what software you need to acquire, install and set up. Much of the software to handle these tasks is freely available so you have very little excuse!

*Charles Zealey is a consultant working with business professionals helping them to improve their organisation's productivity and effectiveness with the use of Information Technology. Typically a return on investment can be achieved with 6-12 months. To access help sheets go to [www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/](http://www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/). For a free half-hour consultation on business IT issues phone 01635 869863 or email [lisa@itsolve.co.uk](mailto:lisa@itsolve.co.uk).*

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