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## Spy Stuff

If you are reading this newsletter, it is likely that you remember James Bond fondly. Notwithstanding any argument over Sean Connery vs. all the others (my wife seems to think that Daniel Craig is a worthy Bond), they all had one thing in common--cool spy toys. Q introduced a multitude of devices that dazzled those of us who have purchased every smaller, cooler, or more capable cell phone since the mid-1990s. (You can Wikipedia "bond" and "gadgets" for some fun reading).



While the ring camera, credit card electronic lock pick, and various homing beacons were all cool to us back then, spies these days have lots of cool toys to choose from--most available for reasonable prices on the internet, if you know where to look. Here are a few of the tools available, if you happen to be a spy.

Ever been curious about where someone is driving? If you were a spy, you'd want to know about a handful of products that track GPS information, speed, start-stop times, and various other information. If you want the info real time (say every 10 seconds), there is a service (with a magnetic case included for discrete under-car placement of the device) that costs about \$1,000 for a year's service. If you can retrieve the device (or for even better information, hook it to the car's computer via the mechanics port, usually under the steering wheel), you are looking at an investment of less than \$200.

What if every time someone made or received a call or a text on their cell, that call or SMS was also going to another number, relaying the entire conversation? Well, if you are in need of a product to do this, the market has a solution for you. It costs \$250 for a year's service (from FlexiSpy), and works on Windows Mobile, iPhone, and Blackberry phones. The only trick is that your spy needs 15 minutes with the target phone to install it.

How about picking up information from a computer? The tool to do this job is a keylogger. If you know where to find them (google), they are free. They can be installed remotely (if the computer has been hacked) and can send data off via an internet connection, anywhere. They are used to record every keystroke, regardless of the application. Search tools make it easy to search through weeks of data from many computers in seconds, typically for credit card information and social security numbers. Fortunately, it seems that the spies that the FBI just caught weren't smart enough to install any keyloggers.



and for  
Devices



\$5,000, and can easily top \$10,000, so only the most Bond-like spies have them.

If you want to look at stuff, you might try the Yukon Viking Night Vision kit (binoculars and goggles kit (~\$500)). If you want to see thermal images, you might try the MSA Evolution 5000, a camera that sees heat signatures used by firefighters, the military, search and rescue. like these start around

Sometimes it is easy being a spy. All you have to do is look to Will.I.Am (Black Eyed Peas) to see someone who has effectively used cool spy technology. His iPad was recently stolen, and he used the GPS functionality to find it (and about \$10k of other stuff). Nice feature.

## Home Rentals Abroad

For those of us with families, getting a very nice room is something that we do without the kids. With kids, it is really hard to justify that \$500-a-night room times two.

The two biggest services that allow people to rent vacation homes on the Internet (both are owned by the same parent, WVR Group) are VRBO (vacation rentals by owner) and HomeAway. Both are usually good (we've not had a bad experience or heard about anyone who has), but sometimes you just get really lucky and get an incredible place at a great price (1 in 5 for us).

The reviews on the sites are very useful, and you can see if people got what they expected for the price. It can take a while to comparison shop (which is wise), but the prices are usually a fraction of paying for two hotel rooms on a nightly basis, and you get a flat, not a room. Some places want a minimum stay (usually 3-7 days), and all require a deposit, usually half, in advance.

If neither of these sites has what you are looking for (locales seem to either have lots or almost nothing), you can also try a few other sites (many are owned by VRBO, but they do not have the same properties), or you can try to home-brew your search by using Google Earth to find rentals and foreign rental sites. The hardest part about using Google Earth or foreign sites, though, is that the sites may not have English pages.

## VoIP and Allworx

Voice over IP (VoIP) had a (well-deserved) reputation as being an expensive replacement for something that worked--dial tone. In the last 5 years, though, VoIP has gone from a bleeding edge technology to a better version of the telephone.

Most vendors are now only making new products that use VoIP, and this has been happening for about the last 4 years. This means that there are no new features coming out on traditional phone systems, and new phone sets are only being developed for VoIP systems. There have been a lot of changes during this time (think of everything your cell phone does that your desk phone doesn't). As phone systems continue to age, it will be time to upgrade, and the upgrade path will be to VoIP.

The interesting thing is that the latest VoIP is not just acceptable, but it is really good. For most companies, VoIP is less expensive on a monthly basis than a plain old telephone system (POTS). Until more recently, though, deciding to make \$25k-\$125k investment in a Cisco Call Manager or ShoreTel solution strained almost every budget.

Now, if you plan to have less than 150 phones sets, you can buy a system from a company called Allworx. They make a system that is easy to set up, low-maintenance, easy to make changes to (simple web interface), and simple. It is incredibly cost effective, with smaller implementations costing less than \$3,000. There is a "soft client" (one that will work on your laptop, wherever you have Internet access), as well as the more complex features (like where inbound calls to certain extensions are routed in order or all at once to many people depending on the time of day).

We've installed about 12 of these systems so far, and the clients that are using them really like them.

## Price Watch

Prices for computer equipment have generally been on the rise since April. This trend has included servers, laptops, desktops, and accessories. At the same time, there has been a see-saw effect with components and software, where prices are falling, but newer versions and models are being introduced. Many of the newer products are far superior to older products, causing an overall rise in average prices.

Hard drives are one exception to the above trend, which have just been falling in price even as size, speed, and performance have been getting much better. 2TB drives are exceptionally cheap right now.

Office 2010 is more expensive than any previous version of Office has ever been. We would (as we mentioned in our last newsletter) still recommend moving to it. It is a huge improvement over previous versions, and it will make your life easier.

Over the coming months, expect server, laptop, desktop, and software prices to start trending downward.

Prices for consumer devices, especially phones, have been fluctuating greatly because of the introduction of the iPad, iPhone 4, new Android phones, and new Blackberry phones. As the hype from the newer models fades, look for prices to also start trending down, not only on new models, but on other devices (prices for high volume items puts price pressure on the category as a whole).

Many devices and consumer goods that have not seen a recent influx of new models are seeing price weakness, as they are competing for consumer dollars in a weak buying environment with flashier new models of other products.

Expect less fluctuation and price instability overall in the coming months, with more rational pricing (both for both corporate and consumer goods). There will likely be fewer deep discounts and fire-sales, but prices will likely drop a little. We can predict this because there has been less volatility in prices over the past 3 months, which likely signals an emergence from a rocky period in the tech sector. This also suggests a stronger tech sector with better profits in the coming 12-18 months.

## Iteon News

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, Iteon acquired Far Above Average. We'd like to welcome both our new clients and our new employees. Jason Reed, JP Martinez, Rick Parrish, Brian Spyksma, and Wyatt Anderson have all come over from Far Above, and we are glad to have them all. Business was moving fast before the transaction, and now with the addition of the new clients, we are really firing on all cylinders.

As always, if you know of any great engineers, please send them to Jay or Steve. We are absolutely hiring, and as you know, our standards are high, and we really value referrals.

Again, thank you all for your business and support. We really appreciate that we have great clients and friends and are grateful for our continued growth.