

Ring's Reflections

by Bob Ring

Who says doctors don't make house calls?

Pat's system was sluggish. She had to give up on simple tasks and start over a lot. Even I was affected. We had communications problems. The close ties of our life together turned sour rapidly.

I'm sure you understand: our home computer network was sick. We were having problems with Pat's desktop computer, laptop, and iPad.

Pat had recently upgraded her computer with a wireless wonder that runs the latest PC operating system, Windows 7. Meanwhile my computer is a six-year-old PC that runs Windows XP. My hard-wired computer system included a router and a modem that linked my computer system to Pat's and directed our internet communications.

Inexplicably Pat couldn't get to certain websites (e.g. Southwest Airlines), downloads of Windows and applications software updates took way too long or paused and had to be restarted, and she couldn't view videos on You Tube.

So Pat went into (former librarian) internet search mode, trying to find people with similar problems and what the "fixes" were. She found plenty of problems but also diametrically opposed solutions for each. Oh the frustration!

Also our difficulties didn't appear to be the typical slow, inefficient computer problems or virus infestations, subject to correction by any of the numerous downloadable quick-fix "solutions" offered in those annoying TV commercials or available on the internet.

We suspected that the major problem was with our home network and the router linking the several devices.

We needed help and since we don't know any teenagers, we started with our internet service provider.

A few years ago, we had tried to install the old router ourselves, with the help of Pat's tech-savvy son, but ran into a rather messy "registration" and password set-up process. We called in our internet provider to complete the job and learned that we didn't want to try that job ourselves again.

This time the internet service "repair" man was a nice enough "techie" but was overwhelmed at Pat's long list of problems. He recommended a computer specialist.

We needed a computer doctor!

We made an appointment for an in-house visit by a computer doctor and prepared a list of questions or complaints – just like we do before seeing a medical specialist. By this time we were sure that we needed a new router, so we purchased one beforehand as he recommended.

When the computer doctor arrived, we pointed him to my computer and the old router. He took one look and immediately burst out laughing at the crazy, haphazard pile of wires under my desk. It was so bad that he powered up his laptop to show me before-and-after photos of some of his wire-organizing solutions - involving peg boards and hooks - that he had provided for other customers. Not a good start.

Next, the computer doctor installed the new router. First of all he discovered that the old router had been set up for both wireless and hard-wire connection to my computer. My computer always used the existing hardwire connection, but wasted time evaluating the connection options. With the new router we disabled the wireless option, thereby increasing my computer's speed.

Now the affect on Pat's computer system is harder for me to explain – a lot harder. The new dual-band router communicated to Pat's computer on a higher frequency, providing more consistent range capability and reducing household interference. Then there was something about 64-bit operating systems being more efficient than 32-bit systems; I got lost at about 6 bits. Lastly, I swear the computer doctor clicked his heels together said something about Kansas.

Anyway, Pat's and my internet operations are now working great.

We took our old (still working) router to Bookmans in return for some book credits.

If there is any lesson here, it may be to be careful mixing old and new equipment in your home network.

Using a computer doctor wasn't cheap, but think about how much you pay a plumber, or in my case lately, an air-conditioning repairman. Oh my God, it's getting warmer in here again!



*Old: This unkempt pile of wires connects my PC tower to a monitor, printer, scanner, modem, router (new), set of speakers, power strip, and cable TV.
(Courtesy of Bob Ring)*



*New: These few wires are power cords for Pat's desktop monitor – containing her PC, a printer/fax/scanner, a desktop lamp, and a power strip, plus a telephone line to the fax.
(Courtesy of Bob Ring)*