

CORRESPONDENT'S WEEK



This week by freelance writer Sonia Speedy

Crises are like teenage yobs, I've decided. They like to group together in gangs and then blindside you when you're not looking. It makes them feel tough.

It feels like I've been a few rounds with a gang of hoodie-wearers after the week I've had. My first crisis came about when my relatively new laptop took to turning itself off randomly several times a day. Very unhelpful when you have a fistful of deadlines and you constantly need to have about a million windows open.

Deep breath. Fine, I can handle this small crisis. Courier laptop off for repairs and bring in reserve laptop, purchased in a time far, far away when we were still scared of the Y2K bug. It may be slow and have just one USB plug so I can't print and use my mouse at the same time but it is reliable and I know it works on the wireless broadband connection I am using because I tested it last week.

Enter crisis number two. Unidentified wireless broadband failure. Just what I need.

I never realised that the internet has become like clean drinking water. You turn on the computer and it is always there. Your emails and contact numbers are just a couple of clicks away. Anyway, no panic. Let's call the IT department. And therein lies the major downfall of being freelance.

Last week, I went to a financial freelancer meeting organised by Charlotte Moore. It's called Freelancers at the Bar and is a kind of support group to make us freelancers feel like we still have work colleagues to talk to and bounce ideas off, instead of just talking to the walls at home. This time, we had a meeting with a group of PRs to talk about how we can scratch each other's backs, so to speak.

One PR was questioning me about the whole freelance lark. Why do you do it? How does it work? How do you get out of bed in the morning? I told her it was fantastic to be in control of your workload, not to have a boss and to be able to work from home as and when you choose. But that was before the IT crisis.

OK, so no IT department. Try tired, grumpy boyfriend fresh from several days working very late nights. After a multitude of swear words and an installation CD being hurled across the room, he can't fix it either.

That means going straight to the top. Phone the ISP provider. No, the right lights are flashing in the right places, they say, so it's not us. Damn. OK, call the wireless router provider. It must be a problem with that. Technical support number disconnected.

Have you ever noticed how resolving crises like these always entails a disproportionate number of phone calls to the actual size of said crisis? I am going to have to call in expert help.

In the meantime, I am resorting to checking my emails on my mobile phone and am contemplating ringing a friend to say: "How you doing? Mind if I pop round for a coffee...and to print out a 100-page full-colour document on director remuneration?"

I have spent several days recently writing consumer money features for Orange.co.uk's money channel - in its offices, which come complete with an inbuilt IT department. But typically, my internet connection kindly broke just in time to coincide with my return to home working.

Corporate Adviser's new editor John Greenwood is expecting 1,500 words from me and it is going to look just great if my copy is late on my first deadline with him.

How did journalists operate before the internet? I may have to resort to old-fashioned methods of communication in the interim. In fact, if you are reading this Correspondent's Week, it probably arrived at MM by horse and cart.