



Covey
Xmas



Consulting
Newsletter
December 2007



“Sir! Mr. Claus, SIR! Despite your BMI being clearly well in excess of 4000, AND the obvious assistance of your colleague Mr. Rudolph, AND of the clearly underage Master Ted, I have to inform you, SIR! that the consumption of 108x106 mince pies during the past 31 hours was totally insufficient to absorb the similar number of tots of likewise consumed sherry and therefore, SIR! I have to inform you SIR! that anything you say.....”

“ZZZZzzzzzzzz”

**Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year from all of the
Covey Consulting Team**

Illustration courtesy of Dennis Creasy

All I DON'T want for Christmas

Geoff Covey

Christmas time is here again and it is the time for giving. A nice thing about presents is that they should not normally be something that useful, but something desirable – this is called a luxury (not sure that it extends to ‘two front teeth’). However, it should not be useless or pointless – lets think about a few examples.

One of the most expensive but pointless item I can think of is a Harley Davidson motor bike. One US motor bike dealer complained “I haven’t sold a new motor bike in ten years, but boy have I sold a lot of the latest Harley Davidson’s”. The Harley Davidson is genuine 1930’s technology sold at an

inflated price. Some bits of it seem to have been designed with the sole object of being technologically inferior – why would anyone design a Vee-twin engine with the cylinders firing 90° apart except to produce rough running and low power output.

I have never owned a motorbike, but I have many friends that have and quite a number of them could be classed as motorbike enthusiasts, but none of them own Harley Davidsons. Most enthusiasts want bikes that go fast, handle well and display technical excellence. Most Italian, Japanese, and once upon a time British, bikes displayed these characteristics – high performance engines, fairings and an almost horizontal riding position with very low handle-bars to keep the overall height down. Harley Davidsons

have none of these characteristics.

For a long-distance touring bike, a more upright riding position is more desirable. BMW arguably make the best bikes for this purpose, they are designed for comfort while maintaining good performance and road holding.

Many Harley Davidson owners feel that the factory-produced item just is not bad enough. Therefore they add 'ape hangers' to increase rider fatigue and further reduce acceleration and top speed, and extended front forks to destroy the handling (and make the end result look even sillier).

There is another type of Harley Davidson owner – this is Paris Hilton – she has her bike painted pink and encrusted with diamonds – enough said?

Harley Davidsons are not the only obsolete technology to be sold at a high price. If you would rather have four outmoded wheels you can buy a Morgan sports car. A wonderful, true story relates to a journalist interviewing a Morgan employee with the usual start:

“And how long have you worked here?”

“Thirty-seven years.”

“You must have seen a lot of changes?”

“No, not really”

The Morgan Plus 8 is a late 1930's car with several times the original power output and some minor improvements to suspension. However, if an ash frame and absence of passenger comforts were the norm in 1935, that is what you will get now.

However, the Morgan differs from Harley Davidson in one important way – it does not pretend to be anything but a replica of a seventy year old car built for rich eccentrics.

A different type of rich eccentric is catered for by the 'luxury ute' (ute is the Australian term, most other English speakers will know it as the 'pick-up'). The ute (or pick-up) is a very useful 'light-truck/lorry' serving as a trade vehicle for farmers, tradesmen, home renovators and a few recreational fishermen who take their hobby to extremes.

There is also an important secondary market for those wanting to create a phoney 'red-neck' status (hands up those who remember Jimmy Carter's brother Billy), or to show they have not forgotten the working class background that they never had.

In recent years we have seen the arrival of the

luxury ute. But why? It is useless as a work vehicle – the solid tray cover (in place of the tarpaulin on real utes) prevents the carriage of large items – which could not be carried any way as they might mark the metallic paint on the tray base (or is it carpeted?). It hardly says “I am a rough-neck/red-neck/one of the people”. It is hard to see that it has any status symbol value either because although it costs a lot it still looks like a light commercial vehicle. Perhaps the whole idea is to display the message “I have no sense of identity, but I have more money than taste” (Can anyone tell me how many Paris Hilton owns?).

Maybe not all of you were planning to spend as much on my Christmas present as the above items suggest, but we can all buy a Swiss Army knife and maybe this makes a sensible gift?

The original idea of the Swiss Army knife was a good one. How useful to have in your pocket a knife, can opener, cork-screw (in the army?) and maybe a saw (even if it is too small to cut anything) and/or some scissors – but now it is time to stop!! Someone thought it a good idea to add a fork and a spoon (how does the average Swiss soldier use a fork knife and spoon all attached to the same handle?), magnifying glass, thing for taking stones out of horses hooves (get up to date – substitute a thing for taking stones out of the treads of Morgans and Harley Davidsons).

All of these additions are individually useful, but with everything on one knife we end up with something that cannot be lifted with one hand, the only pocket knife that won't fit in a pocket.

(Switzerland has not gone to war for two hundred years, next time it does will we see infantry advancing while pushing wheelbarrows to carry their knives?).

Please understand that I would still like to receive practical luxuries, like the pen with which I am writing this. It has a watch on one side, a torch in one end and by unscrewing it in the right place I can get access to a screwdriver and a computer memory stick. I admit it is rather bulky and heavy to write with, the battery and pen refill have to be so small that they don't work for long, there is no space for buttons to reset the watch time, the screwdriver doesn't fit any screws I have come across and the memory stick has a capacity of 4kb and is not compatible with most computers (including mine), but it is a very useful, desirable object.

Covey Christmas Crossword

Dennis Shore

At Christmas even the committed Covey consultants have been known to take a break from their efforts in support of clients. At these times the active Covey craniums turn their mental capacities to tackle those giant crosswords that substitute for comment in the holiday editions of the daily newspapers (thereby modestly assisting the financial situation of those associated with the paper industry). Crosswords are generally agreed to be the most popular word game around the world.

For all of us, even Reg, Crosswords have always been part of our lives; so much so that few of us have ever given much thought to how crosswords came into being.

Like all matters of history, there is always some difficulty in filtering between fact and fiction. Nevertheless extensive research on Google turned up **6,930,000** references to crossword history in 0.18 seconds, all of which (well at least the first few pages) seem to be in some consensus that an Arthur Wynne (1862-1945) devised the crossword puzzle as we know it today.

According to the American Crossword Tournament Puzzle website (whose standing in the world of crossword credibility we have no idea – although it appears to be edited by the doyens of crossword creation) the precursors of crosswords appeared in England during the 19th century. They were an elementary kind, apparently derived from the word square, a group of words arranged so the letters read alike vertically and horizontally, and printed in children's puzzle books and various periodicals, sometimes with pictures as clues or with an educational slant.

Word squares in fact go back to ancient times.

The first known word square, called the Sator Square, is carved in stone and dates from the first century A.D. in Pompeii (Herculaneum to be precise). This particular square, which can be read four ways (left to right, right to left, top to bottom, and bottom to

R	O	T	A	S
O	P	E	R	A
T	E	N	E	T
A	R	E	P	O
S	A	T	O	R

top), is often translated as "Arepo, the sower, watches over his works." The significance of this verse is unknown but this Square even today is widely promoted as a Talisman.

Word squares are in fact difficult to compose — it is reported that the 10-letter word square (apparently the holy grail of word squares) has yet to be devised by either person or computer.

Anyhow, back to Arthur Wynne. It seems that he had the job of devising a "Weekly Puzzle Page for Fun", an 8-page comic section of the *New York World* (a publication owned by Pulitzer – of Pulitzer prize fame but which nevertheless ceased publication in 1931). Wynne came from Liverpool (UK) and presumably had knowledge of the word square, but in any case he created what he called a **Word-cross** for the Christmas 1913 edition, published on 21 December. Probably Wynne had no idea that this would start a worldwide craze and there seems to be no information published to suggest whether this success translated to fortune as well as fame for him. Wynne also created other puzzles and is also given credit for the first insertion of black squares in the spaces between the letters.

The puzzle page in the *New York World* had previously featured plenty of anagrams, rebuses (representations of a name / word / phrase using pictures), hidden words and connect-the-dots drawings. As you can see from the reproduction of the first word-cross below, Wynne's design for the Christmas edition differed from today's crosswords - it was diamond shaped and contained no internal black squares. In the grid, FUN, the name of the comic section, was inserted across the top squares, and in the rest of the grid was to be filled in. Wynne numbered the squares at the start and end of each word. The puzzle was printed with the instruction to the solver: "Fill in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions". This was the first crossword.

The new puzzle immediately became popular, and continued to appear every week. After a few weeks the name was changed from **Word-cross** to **Cross-word**. After experimenting with different shapes, including a circular puzzle, Wynne eventually settled on a rectangular pattern. It was some time later that the hyphen was dropped, and the Cross-word became a Crossword.

From the outset readers began submitting

crosswords they had composed, and soon Wynne was regularly using these submissions. However the weekly crossword was plagued by typesetting errors and as a result the crossword was dropped – but only for one week, such was the protest from readers.

Surprisingly, despite their popularity, crosswords appeared nowhere else but the *New York World*, which continued to publish crosswords for ten years without real competition. It was in this period crosswords began to assume their familiar form. In April 1924, a couple of newly-qualified graduates of the Columbia School of Journalism (Dick Simon and Lincoln Schuster), set up in business as publishers. They chose a book of the puzzles from the archives of the *New York World* as their first publication. \$1.35 bought readers the challenge of 50 puzzles, and a free pencil! Whether it was the challenge or the free pencil, this book was an immediate massive hit, selling more than 150,000 copies in the first year and launched the crossword craze worldwide.

During the early 1920's other newspapers picked up the newly discovered pastime and within a decade crossword puzzles were featured in almost all American newspapers and millions of people were hooked. One of the last holdouts to the crossword craze was the *New York Times*, which first published a Sunday puzzle in 1942 and a daily puzzle in 1950. Today you'd be hard pressed to find a newspaper anywhere that doesn't print a crossword puzzle.

Simon & Schuster still publish a crossword series of books but interestingly, they did not want their names on the initial book because they were not sure it would be a success. If you really must know, the publisher of the book was shown as Plaza Publishing.

The first appearance of a crossword in a British publication was in *Pearson's Magazine* in February 1922. *The Daily Express* however was the first British Newspaper to regularly publish crosswords in the UK and the first *Times* crossword appeared on February 1, 1930. British puzzles quickly developed their own style, being considerably more difficult than the American variety. In particular the cryptic crossword became established and rapidly gained popularity.

Despite much trawling of the Google data base we have been unable to determine when crosswords

migrated to Australia.

Crossword puzzles evolved with the introduction of "themes." Not every crossword puzzle has a theme, in fact most don't. But many crossword puzzle constructors gained popularity by introducing themes into their puzzles.

A major breakthrough in crossword puzzle development came with the personal computer. As a technically based organisation Covey Consulting should report that several doctoral papers have been written on the subject, some of which claimed it was impossible for a computer to create a crossword puzzle! The mathematical strain on a computer is enormous, apparently more difficult even than programming a computer to play chess. The first computer software was in fact pretty primitive, but has since greatly advanced. In 1997 a company called Variety Games Inc. was issued the first US patent (5,677,438) on using a computer to create crossword puzzles. Their software (Crossword Weaver) allows the creation of standard publication style crossword puzzles with a theme. This allows anyone to create crossword puzzles, whereas historically they were created only by a few people. Crossword Weaver claims to still be the leading crossword creator.

According to Guinness Records, the most prolific crossword compiler is Roger Squires from the UK. On 14th May 2007 he published his 66,666th crossword, equivalent to 2 million clues. He is one of only four people to have provided cryptic puzzles to *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times* & *The Independent*. He also holds the record for the longest word ever used in a published crossword - the 58-letter Welsh town *Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch* clued as an anagram.

Readers who enjoyed the Inspector Morse series (or those who vegetated in front of TV to enjoy John Thaw's interpretation of Morse) will know that Morse was a crossword tragic. In fact it was Colin Dexter, the author of the Morse novels who was the crossword tragic. Dexter is a fan of cryptic crosswords, and Morse is named after champion solver Sir Jeremy Morse, one of Dexter's contemporaries as a clue-writer in the crossword world. In every novel (except the first) the surname of the killer was taken from those of winners of the weekly Azed solving competition in *The Observer*. In fact for a time Dexter wrote a weekly column in *The*

Guardian on how to solve cryptic crosswords.

On the subject of crossword tragics, Robert Turcot of Quebec, Canada published the world's largest crossword in 1982. It offered 12,489 clues across and 13,125 down. A few determined fans are said to be still trying to fill in its 82,951 squares.

Another piece of (perhaps useless) information is the lexicon surrounding crosswords. The creating of crosswords is called *cruciverbalism* among its practitioners, who are referred to as *cruciverbalists*. The terms derive from the Latin for *cross* and *word*. Those with less inflated egos rarely use these terms, calling crossword creators *constructors* or *compilers* or (especially outside the United States) *setters*.

Finally, for those of us concerned about the onset of senior moments, crosswords may be the lifeline to help prevent development of senility or degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. Activities such as doing crosswords, playing cards or chess, learning a new language, gardening, or taking up a new hobby, among others, all help postpone the cognitive decline caused by normal ageing. The buzzword for such age-combating mental gymnastics is "neurobics". Research at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Centre at Rush University, Chicago, consistently suggests that crosswords, along with other forms of cognitive leisure activity, help maintain cognitive function.

The stimulating effects of crossword-solving were appreciated right from the early days. One Philadelphia housewife wrote to a newspaper in 1925, extolling their merits: "A woman who has small children and has to be in her home a great deal of the time needs something to make her think and use her mental faculties. Cross-wording is just the thing."

There are national differences in the style of crosswords. Margaret Petherbridge-Farrar, former puzzle editor of *The New York Times* and apprentice to Arthur Wynne (cited in "The People's Almanac" books), notes the British style uses many un-keyed letters with no cross clues, eliminates most short words, and features difficult definitions. In the U.S., conservative rules usually call for symmetrical patterns, no more than 1/6 of the squares black, all-over interlock of words, no cutoff segments or unkeyed letters. The quality of puzzles is judged by the ingenuity of word combinations and skill in selection of definitions or clues. Given Australia's British heritage it is not surprising that we follow

the British style. In fact an Australian publisher (Lovatts) is a major creator of crosswords (and Sudoku's and other puzzles) for the British market. And in case you think that crosswords are just an English aberration, think again. Crosswords have transcended all languages and crosswords exist even with languages based on characters (such as Japanese)! For the edification of all readers, some of the translations for crossword in other languages are shown below:

Dansk (Danish)
n. - krydsord

Français (French)
n. - mots croisés

Deutsch (German)
n. - Kreuzworträtsel

Ελληνική (Greek)
n. - σταυρόλεξο

Italiano (Italian)
cruciverba

Português (Portuguese)
n. - palavras (f pl) cruzadas

Русский (Russian)
кроссворд

Español (Spanish)
n. - crucigrama

Svenska (Swedish)
n. - korsord

中文 (简体) (Chinese (Simplified))
纵横填字谜

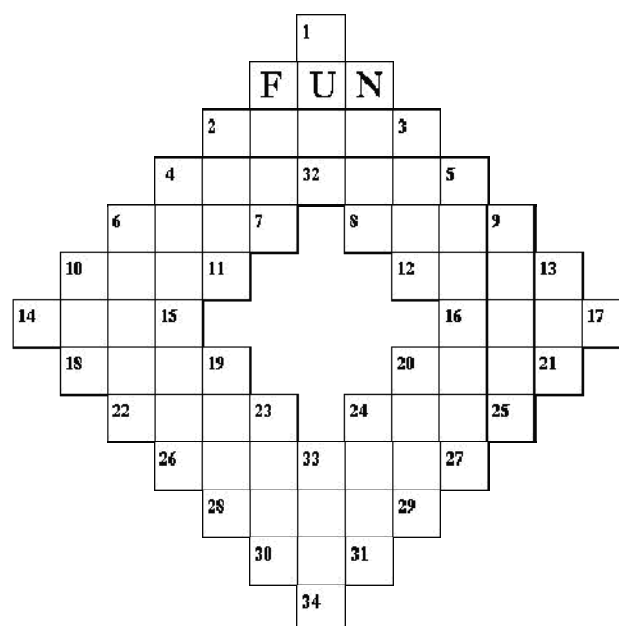
한국어 (Korean)

日本語 (Japanese)

n. - 크로스워드 퍼즐 n. - クロスワードパズル

Would you like to try the world's first crossword puzzle?

[clues on next page]



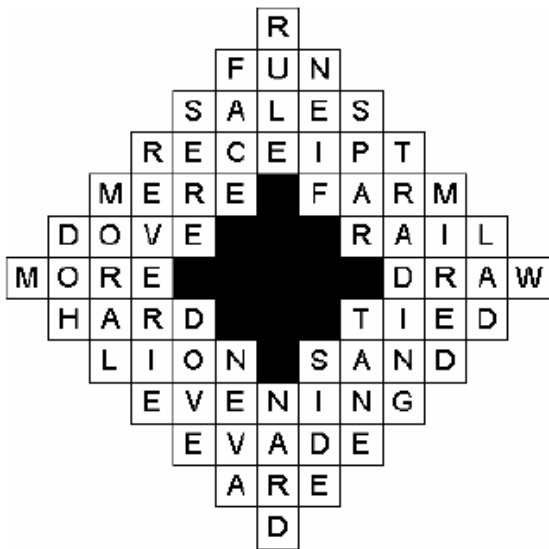
**By Arthur Wynne, December 21, 1913
from *The New York World***

"Fill in the squares with which agree following tions"

2-3.	What bargain hunters enjoy.	6-22.	What we all should be.
4-5.	A written acknowledgment.	4-26.	A day dream.
6-7.	Such and nothing more.	2-11.	A talon.
10-11.	A bird.	19-28.	A pigeon.
14-15.	Opposed to less.	F-7.	Part of your head.
18-19.	What this puzzle is.	23-30.	A river in Russia.
22-23.	An animal of prey.	1-32.	To govern.
26-27.	The close of a day.	33-34.	An aromatic plant.
28-29.	To elude.	N-8.	A fist.
30-31.	The plural of is.	24-31.	To agree with.
8-9.	To cultivate.	3-12.	Part of a ship.
12-13.	A bar of wood or iron.	20-29.	One.
16-17.	What artists learn to do.	5-27.	Exchanging.
20-21.	Fastened.	9-25.	To sink in mud.
24-25.	Found on the seashore.	13-21.	A boy.
10-18.	The fibre of the gomuti palm.		

small words with the defini-

Puzzle Solution



Oops...Correction to Sept '07 article.

The boat name is Cochon Noir and we had ice cream **only three times a year**.
 When the boat shed on our pontoon jetty is finished it will be called "La Porcherie".
 Eddie Blundstone.
 Ed.



GRUMBLE VOUCHER

Upon presentation of this voucher to another person, the holder of this voucher is entitled to be listened to with full attention and without interruption (unless comment is requested) for up to 5 minutes, on matters that are worrying, causing distress, grief, anxiety or difficulty or on matters that are just jolly irritating them.
On completion of the grumble the ownership of this voucher goes to the grumblee.

COVEY CONSULTING CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

Cunning cruciverbalist Covey craftily compiles Cryptic Christmas Crossword conundrum.
Curiously constructed compounding critical calculations, conjoining concepts cleverly.

You are invited to fine tune your skills by attempting/completing this finely crafted example of wordsmithing put together by the Messrs Shore & Covey. All the answers relate to Covey Consulting and the industries that we serve.

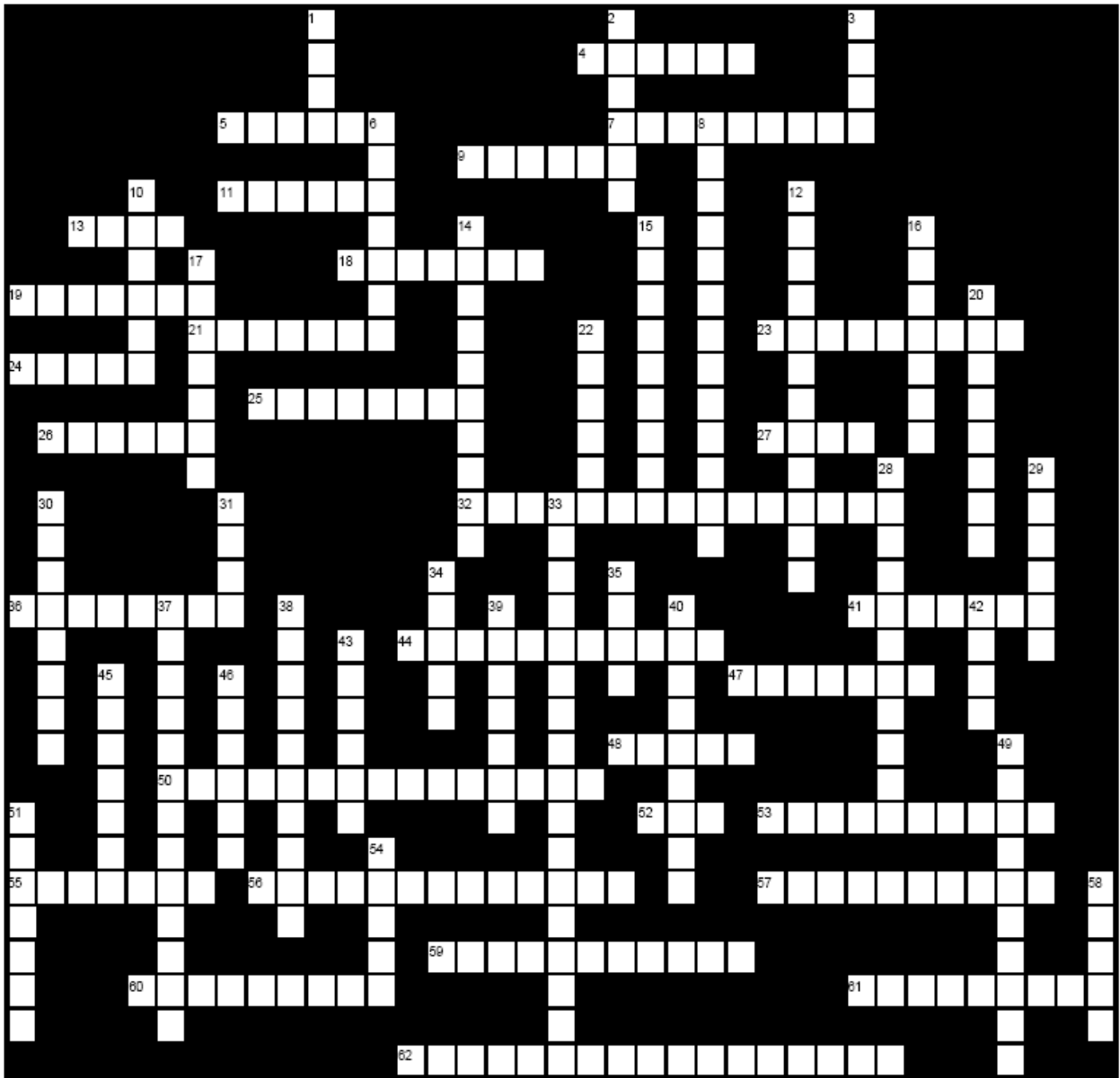
ACROSS	
4	Joy of eating will prevent a goitre (6)
5	Shows movies, keeps out insects, or rejects shives (6)
7	Sounds like sea captain, but it's on the nose (9)
9	Onomatopoeic paper for when you sneeze (6)
11	Shiny leather will protect your invention (6)
13	Bottom note and ancient, but not all that glistens (4)
18	A bit of Australian music award mixes for a pine(7)
19	10 down takes a pole to find the dregs (7)
21	Communist drink will cure jet lag (3,4) (according to Covey Consulting News)
23	Yevrah Ger returns to manage processes (6,3)
24	Small change for paper maker (5)
25	Jester's hat once was paper (8)
26	Small coin for a policeman (6)
27	Tactile sensation goes through the press or under the carpet (4)
32	Turbulent boots! (5, 10)
36	Lawyer's home for American writing tablet (5,3)
41	We hear a stupid scam for chips (7)
44	Where sailors get their rum, or is it turps? (5,6)
47	Base sag changes for sugar cane leftovers (7)
48	Cleopatra's snake two ways for American tree (5)
50	Group of birds with government agent before bell sounds for excellence in engineering (5,10)
52	Flea returns and covers a can (3)
53	Pickle not in with point of pencil for best engineer (5,5)
55	German general after short weight for a rolling screen (7)
56	Big river fruit trees for an engineer (6, 7)
57	A,K,Q,J or legal direction? (5,5)
59	Jack tree loses direction with candle part will find your papers (4,7)
60	Used to be 'carbon' now it is 'Xerox' (4,5)
61	Duplicate correctly and it can't be duplicated at all (9)
62	Wrinkled necromancer makes the flute (11,6)

DOWN	
1	How big it is to keep water out! (4)
2	A vat was in the past (6)
3	North age for strip lighting (4)
6	Sounds like after dark pay loading will make things grow (7)
8	Becoming an officer or starting up (13)
10	Lull without a learner gets old for a head space (6)
12	An old refiner drives the grouse from the glen (6, 6)
14	Secondary fibre and just what you shouldn't do (5,5)
15	Sandwich for an elephant? That is a lot of paper! (5,4)
16	Old public bar or part of modern smelter? (3,4)
17	French sea and spicy meal without the king for fast 46 down(7)
20	Sucking blood or just extracting what you want? (8)
22	Not a Dixie tissue dryer? (6)
28	Big den at the beach for the General Manager (6,5)
29	Can be achieved with enough tissue! (3,3)
30	A rate of 1% won't arouse much (8)
31	Be at the front for the heavy metal (4)
33	Placing your money before selecting actors is the same as loosing wax (10, 7)
34	Not cheese, but strong (5)
35	Smooth it out or it can rust (4)
37	Time in which to return an injury or just to break even (7,6)
38	"Pulp wood" it sounds like we hear the sheep say to the shearer (10)
39	Australian eleven in mixed bet for aluminium mineral (7)
40	Latest short race makes the morning paper (9)
42	Stagecoach without company doesn't hold water (4)
43	Good French follows auto and can make a diamond (6)
45	Sheep after a vicious canine! Hard to melt it (7)
46	Small slice changes for raw material for a dollar (6)
49	Change vest direction with all that comes to the mill to find what's in it (5,5)
51	First person and old servant, its a gas! (6)
54	Queen Elizabeth follows bay to make alumina (5)
58	James Galway's instrumental in keeping the boards apart (5)

COMPETITION

We are going to give a \$100 Amazon voucher to the correct entry that is picked at random from all correct entries received by 18 January 2008.

Answers to published in next edition.



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**Faster than a sleeping snail... More organised than Brownian motion... As customer focussed as a headless chicken....
It's TELSTRA!!!!**

Geoff Covey

Through much of October many of you will have had difficulty in ringing me, and will have noticed that replies to emails were even slower than usual – read on...

Bronwyn and I moved to Queensland last year to my mother-in-law's (Sylvia's) house. Sylvia was widowed several years ago and she felt it was best that we live in the main house and she move into a 'granny flat'. The planning approval process for the granny flat was bewildering (another story one day?) but eventually it was built and Sylvia moved in.

Initially there was a cordless extension of the house phone to the granny flat, but once things had settled down it seemed sensible to transfer the number she had used for forty-five years to Sylvia's flat and add a new number to the house for the rest of us. Just one complication – we have Telstra's Bigpond internet attached to the existing line and wanted to transfer this to the new number to keep billing simple (Hah!).

Late September - As the account-holder, Sylvia rang Telstra and explained her needs – particularly the quick shift of the Bigpond account as it is heavily used for business. 'No problems.' said the Telstra representative, 'We do this sort of switch every day.' A slight tone of 'Why are you worrying about such things' annoyance creeping in to the voice. Despite this it was agreed that I would ring back in a couple of days to confirm details. After a mere three-quarters of an hour on the phone, Sylvia thought everything was fixed for change over on 12th October.

A couple of days later – I rang to confirm details. 'Yes we have it down to disconnect the service from the house and transfer it to the granny flat'.

'But it is supposed to be an extension added to the granny flat, plus an additional service to the house and switching across Bigpond.'

'That is not on the work order, but we can take care of it.'

Another half hour on the phone and everything was organised, right down to the new phone number – now for 15th October (remember these dates, they

are important).

Monday 9th October – Evening thunderstorms in southern Brisbane. Power surge down phone line. Internet gateway box now smoking impressively and ethernet cards on two computers burnt out.

Tuesday 10th October – Mad dash to Dick Smith's, new gateway, signal splitters and surge protectors purchased - shutting the door after the horse has (lightning) bolted! By lunch time most of the system is working again (switch over to one spare computer) and continued to work well until Friday 12th! (Telstra has no sense of the dramatic).

Friday 12th October – All started well, but then around the middle of the day I lost the ADSL signal. I tried resetting, disconnecting everything, putting things together in a different order (I don't have any delusions about my knowledge of computer systems). Nothing worked.

I phoned my local computer repair shop. Despite it being Friday afternoon they managed to get a technician to me within an hour. He worked through the system, confirmed that there was a dial tone on the line, checked my connexions were correct and finally concluded that my new gateway probably had a fault. A quick dash back to the shop for another gateway showed that this was not the problem. Perhaps there was a problem with the service.

A call to Bigpond. Working my way through level after level of pressing some number or other (said to be 'to help us deal with your enquiry efficiently' - despite all the evidence to the contrary) including the one where I pressed '1' if the problem was on the line I was calling from. A wait. A customer service consultant. I explained my problem.

"Are you calling on the line with the problem?"

"Yes"

"But there is no Bigpond account associated with that line. What is your customer i.d.?" I gave it.

"But that is connected to 3206 4121"

"Yes that is my number."

"No. You are calling from 3206 2680."

"I have never heard of that numb... Just a minute please." Some sort of memory jogged itself and I checked a piece of paper. "That is a number that is not supposed to be installed until next Monday, and then on a different line."

"Oh, we changed it over today."

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why didn’t anyone tell me that it was going to happen.”

“I don’t know.”

“Well can you change the Bigpond account over to this line.”

“No problem, but it will take three working days”

“But it is supposed to happen on Monday anyway”

“Oh, well, it will happen then.”

“But I want my internet now”

“Sorry”

“But I didn’t ask you to disconnect!”

“Sorry the system takes that long to register a change”.

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!

Hang up. Technician goes home. I think “Oh well, it is only for the week-end”. Isn’t naivety wonderful at my age?

Monday 15th October – Technician arrives on time – this worries me, but it turns out that he is not a Telstra employee - he is a contractor. I start to explain where I want connections made and where the phone is to go in the granny flat. He looks at his instruction sheet. ‘All I have got here is to ensure that there is a dial tone on the existing spare line’

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!

Being a contractor, not a Telstra employee, he is not fazed, just makes a phone call to get the price and then prepares to start work. (I had been expecting the standard Telstra response “I haven’t got the parts here, but we can schedule a new time the week after next’ – but being a contractor he had spare cable and fittings with him!).

Within an hour the job is done. (I understand why some people are opposed to Telstra outsourcing – it results in work actually being DONE – where will that get Telstra Sir Humphrey?). We now have two phone lines working, but still no internet. Another long call to Telstra. At this point my brain began to curdle and I become less sure of the sequence of events, however, you will get the general drift. I was told that the service had been restored but that it would not take effect until the close of business when the “Telstra computer and the Bigpond

computer talk to each other” (It is all one company, why do we need this stage?).

It was not restored at close of business. I rang Telstra again to be told that I would need to talk to some other department (Accounts I think, but I was losing track), but as it was now after the close of business they had all gone home ‘So that means another day without service?’

‘Yes .’

‘And I have to wait until the close of business to see if the change ahs occurs, and if it hasn’t I can’t make any progress until the next day, because it is after the close of business’

‘Yes’

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!

Tuesday 16th October – Rang accounts (or whoever). “Because the service is being transferred from one name to another, we will need to talk to Sylvia” She is out for the day. Despite the fact that I reminded them that Sylvia had requested the change three weeks before, this did not count (because the work order had not been correctly entered by Telstra).

“So when will I get my internet back?”

“Three working days after she calls us” Three weeks after she called and asked for the work the first time!! (Bloody customers, expecting us to hurry just because we stuffed it up. What do they think we are here for).

At this point I asked to speak to a supervisor.

“Just a minute”. A few minutes passed. “I have spoken to the supervisor, he is busy, but he can speak to you later, but he says he can only repeat what I have already told you.” (Bloody customers, expecting us to hurry just because we stuffed it up. What do they think we are here for). “Why did you want to speak to him anyway?”

“So I could complain about Telstra’s appalling level of service!”

“That would be complaints department. But you don’t need to ring them, you can send a message on the internet!”

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!

“I would love to. When can you give my internet service back so I can make my complaint”

“Three working days after Sylvia calls us!”

Wednesday 17th October – Sylvia calls Bigpond AGAIN. Eventually the promise that now is all well and that service will be restored in three working days – Monday 22nd October.

Monday 22nd October. – I ring Telstra soon after start of business. A recorded message suggests that instead of wasting Telstra's staffs' valuable time, I should be checking the progress of my order on the internet. AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!! Eventually I get through to a consultant. "Yes the activation code was entered this morning."

"But I still haven't got a service!"

"No, well, it won't take effect until close of business today when the Telstra computer and the Bigpond computer talk to each other"

AARRGGGHHHHHH!!!!!! (One thing about writing this story, I can use 'cut and paste' a lot. I give up in despair.

6pm – service is restored!!!! GREAT JOY!!!

I have used a bit of direct quotation – I cannot promise the words are exact, but the sense is (this is called historical something-or-other). Telstra may refer back to recordings (made to ensure quality standards are maintained – no sense in them improving).

A couple of general irritations about my dealings on this matter:

Almost every time I rang Telstra or Bigpond (and let us not forget it is the same company) I received a message to the effect "Due to abnormally high demand there will be longer than usual delays in answering your call" (i.e. "Bugger off and stop whining just because we don't feel like providing the service we charge you for"). Sometimes I then went straight to a consultant, other times I had the standard Telstra minimum 30 minute wait. Why don't they do what many help lines do and tell you your place in the queue every couple of minutes, or the estimated time until you will be answered?

When one is struggling to get ones internet service restored, or to find out why it still has not been connected, it is very frustrating to hear the suggestion that you could be doing all this by internet!

For our overseas readers – Telstra is the phone company that runs Bigpond as an internet provider. It was 100% government owned but has been gradually sold off. The government still owns about half but is looking to sell this off to. Traditionalists are opposed to further sales on the

grounds that it 'would inevitably lead to a deterioration in the service provided.' Personally, I do not see how it could get any worse – but I really hope that Telstra will not take this as a challenge.

Yes this a long piece about one incident, but sadly it is not an isolated one. It is typical, just more prolonged of the general problems that I have had with Telstra. I am not alone – I have spent a fair amount of time over the days following apologising to people for not responding to their calls or emails – as soon as I mention Telstra, most of them respond with 'its happened to you too then'.

Also, in fairness, most of the many Telstra staff I spoke to were courteous and tried to help. It is the company and its systems that seem to be the problem.

News from : The Allan Family in Myanmar, Burma

Mingalabar, ne hgong la? (Great to see you, How are you?). I hope you can reply - Ne hgong dey. (I'm well.)



At present you may hear some news of Myanmar due to civil unrest again. Unfortunately last week's gas price rises of 500%, diesel rises of 100%, and petrol rises of 60% have led to demonstrations, and the fallout of this has been rather uncivil. Increases will inevitably lead to a new period of dramatic price rises in everything as costs flow on in every sphere of life. Some say that this set of increases is just part of the government preparing the privatization of a centralized function that may not be working – given that the black market flourishes so strongly for fuels. Others say that the current chaos is intended to show the clear need for the military to retain control, as clearly no country ready for democracy would be so unruly. As part of the protests there have been many arrests – and being arrested here is not something one would

hope for. Recent detention again of almost all of the 88 Generation students is interpreted very badly by many. The national convention continues & while it is rumoured that this should be the last before the long awaited constitution ratification, there is no surety of this. Life goes on as normal here!!!

Progress with work at World Concern continues to be very satisfying. Communities value our assistance greatly and some show amazing examples of taking initiative in planning their own projects and their own development path. In general the program work is going very well, impacts are clear in the communities, the national team are developing well, some restructuring has been effective and risks are manageable.

Lowlights of work have been lack of donor support for our work, mostly due to lack of foreign government support for work in Myanmar, difficulties in meeting requirements for donors & dealing with some issues of fraud, which are always hard. Each of these seem to require inordinate amounts of energy & patience.

Amazingly after 18months of being without MOU (memorandum of understanding with Health Ministry – this effectively determines the legality of operations), this has been renewed. After more than 2 years work we have an MOU with Ministry of Agriculture allowing expansion of Karen State work (South East). So while some parts of work here seem to become progressively more difficult, there are real surprises.



I'm very pleased with how the senior management team here is developing. I feel increasingly confident in their ability to take over the program well when the time comes. Work relationships are great, and while there is much too much work for us, and not enough space, team motivation levels seem very high. Progress towards program future localization continues, albeit at a more measured pace than I'd like. Perhaps one of the most interesting areas of involvement has been in assisting development of regional focus & networks on the impacts of the extremely rapid growth of extractive industries (oil, gas, minerals, forestry), agribusiness, large scale plantations & hydro-power developments on indigenous peoples, displacement and human rights issues. Developing a positive approach to engagement is an opportunity.

I've also had a board role with an organization named "Paung Ku" – interpretation can be something like "Connections" or "The Bridge". This organization has specifically been set up to channel funds and mentoring assistance for the further development of civil society projects to smaller organisations. For society to have a chance for future development here, much work is needed in this area, as the diversity and variety of community activities, services and projects that you would expect in a normal society simply doesn't exist here. While this is early days for this, it shows enormous future promise.

And as for life outside of work? Well, it mostly seems to revolve around getting enough exercise to stay fit and healthy, resting from this, and family time. On a trip to China I bought a new bicycle – a "Beijing Bicycle" & my first NEW one 30 years. Having some shock absorbers on the heavily potholed roads here seems like absolute luxury – I justify it by the improved safety. After the wet season it would be really nice to do some cycle touring here – so if there are any interested takers out there, let me know.

Being ever hopeful I'm looking forward to a slightly quieter 2008, with more exercise, more family time and more time to enjoy all the great things Myanmar can offer! It is an amazing place.

David Allan

