

Gerald's Column

by Gerald Fitton

Last month I invited you all to have fun with at my (new) website, fitton.org.uk. I have received a lot of feedback, some via Archive on Line but mainly in private emails. I shall not be able to deal with these many points this month because ...

Miserable failure

I went on holiday on the 13th May 2005 and when I returned what did I find? The Archive magazine had been published, many of you tried to visit <http://www.fitton.org.uk> and it wasn't there! Indeed, over the last few weeks it has been a tale of woe.

I don't know exactly what has happened to DeeNine (the agent through whom I bought the domain name 'fitton.org.uk') but I received one email in reply to the effect that they were going to fix it followed by complete silence. I am no expert in these things but I suspect that DeeNine are no longer trading.

<http://archive.abacusline.co.uk>

You may have noticed something strange about this email address. There is no "www" in the URL. This is not a mistake. Try it and see. If you try <http://www.abacusline.co.uk/> then you will finish up somewhere completely different! Let me tell you about it.

EasySpace

After my lovely holiday (in a self catering cottage in Cornwall), as the days rolled by I became increasingly doubtful about the possibility that DeeNine would rise from the ashes. Consequently I looked around for an alternative. I found the agent EasySpace.

Through them I bought the domain name 'abacusline.co.uk' as part of a package which gives me 500 MB of web space. My intention is to move my 'Abacusline' website currently at <http://www.abacusline.demon.co.uk> to <http://www.abacusline.co.uk>. It is almost the same URL. What is missing is the word "demon" in the title.

For those of you with an Internet connection, if you have a look at the EasySpace website then you will see three levels of hosting package. The one which I have chosen is the one which they call Gold.

It does not have password protected areas like the DeeNine site had. I regret that. However, it does have something which I shall describe to you.

Sub Domains

Some agents call these 'Third Level Domains'. As far as I can see 'Third Level Domains' and 'Sub Domains' are the same thing.

There are things called 'TLD'. These 'TLD' things are not 'Third Level Domains' but 'Top Level Domains' and they are the bits on the end such as ".com", ".co" and ".net". As far as I can see there are a few dozen TLDs. A new one which has been proposed (and given some publicity in the media) is ".xxx". This TLD is intended for use by those who wish to set up what, euphemistically, we might call an 'Adult Site'!

The domain ".co.uk", part of my 'abacusline.co.uk' domain name, is a Top Level Domain.

The 'abacusline' is an SLD, that is a 'Second Level Domain'. You will notice that the bit at the end (.co.uk) might be regarded as the most significant part (meaning it is looked at first) with the 'abacusline', the secondary part, being evaluated after the first part.

Now we come to the 'archive' in 'archive.abacusline.co.uk'. The 'archive' bit is a Third Level Domain. As I said, the part 'archive' is an example of what is often referred to as a 'Sub Domain'.

Some agents offer sub domains as part of their packages. DeeNine Basic Hosting does (perhaps I should use the past tense and say "did") not offer sub domains but EasySpace does. So I looked into this facility more deeply.

FTP

FTP stands for 'File Transfer Protocol'. An FTP program is usually offered as part of an Internet package. My first Internet package included the browser Fresco and an FTP program which, I think, was called "FTP"!

In order to upload files to a website you need an FTP program (or some package which will handle FTP commands). When it is run with the correct username and password the website opens up as a directory (some people call them folders) in a window. What I saw when I got to the brand new 'abacusline.co.uk' site was (amongst other things) a directory called 'www'. The simple instructions were to place my opening page (which has to be index.htm or a variant of this) within this www directory.

I created a simple dummy HTML page with a few words in it; I uploaded it into the www directory and then tried <http://www.abacusline.co.uk>. Result - great joy! It worked.

Where are these Sub Domains?

It was time to read all the documentation. I have to tell you that it isn't easy. Let me rephrase that. It isn't easy when you don't understand what the words mean - and I didn't!

Finally, and with much trial and error, I discovered where to put a sub domain on my abacusline.co.uk website. It was in the top level directory, the one which opened with my FTP program. It was in the one containing the www directory which I had already used.

Let me make this as clear as I can. When I opened the website I saw the directory www. I did not double click on www to open it (and get inside it). I created a new directory called 'archive' so that I could see (in my website window) both www and archive in the same top level directory.

I was going to include a screen shot at this point but I have done so much to the site since then that a screenshot would probably confuse you rather than clarify the situation.

Inside the 'www' domain

The www directory now contains what people generally will think of as a website. At the moment it contains a file called [index.html] which says something like "Welcome to Abacusline" and there are links from this page to other pages all of which are contained within the www directory. There is, for example, a file [www.Maths.Stats.Probably.html] (the case of the letters is important) tucked away inside the www directory. If you go to the URL <http://www.abacusline.co.uk/Maths/Stats/Probably.html> then you will discover what this file contains - a short article about conditional probability and the value of imperfect information. I wrote it a long time ago and I could do better now!

Inside the 'archive' sub domain

You will never get to the 'archive' sub domain by investigating in depth the material you will find inside <http://www.abacusline.co.uk>.

Let me repeat that, when I look at the 'abacusline.co.uk' website using my FTP program I see (well, I saw then - I see lots more now) both the 'www' and 'archive' directories.

I opened the 'archive' directory and, using the FTP program, I uploaded a simple page called [index.htm] with something on it I could easily recognise as being distinct from the [index.html] file inside the www directory.

Then I used my usual browser to get to the URL <http://archive.abacusline.co.uk> (note the absence of the 'www') and, what did I find? Wonder and joy! The page which I had uploaded into the archive sub domain.

After that I uploaded into the archive sub domain some directories, some pictures, some sound files (associated with and describing the pictures) and a short movie. I checked and all these were available at <http://archive.abacusline.co.uk>.

The Archive-on-Line list

I sent a short posting to A-o-L stating that <http://www.fitton.org.uk> had failed and that the new site, <http://archive.abacusline.co.uk/> was up and running.

It is this second site, running within a 'Third Level Domain' which has provided me with the feedback which, because of space, I can not deal with fully this month.

Feedback

I shall answer only a couple of points this month.

My first comment is that I use a text editor (such as !Edit) to create my html pages.

I do use a few of the fancy programs to produce effects on some experimental html pages but then I load the raw html into a text editor and see how the effect is produced. Armed with this knowledge I use the text editor to recreate whatever I want rather than upload to my website the direct result of the fancy program.

My other comment (I shall try to be brief) is that I have deliberately included on some of the pages 'tags' (which are instructions to whatever you use as a browser) which may or may not be supported by 'your' browser. I have tried to use these 'unusual' tags in such a way that it should not completely ruin the display of the pages for you if your browser does not support those tags or the syntax I have used within those tags.

In doing this my motivation has been to encourage users of the web to get to know what their browsers will and will not interpret and thus encourage them to ask for something more than they have now. It is most definitely not a statement on my part that RISC OS users should use something like Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator as their browser - though many of my correspondents have said that they have bought a Windows machine out of frustration because some (or many) of the websites they want to visit can not be seen correctly using a RISC OS browser.

The RISC OS hardware is more than capable of displaying websites as the designers have intended. What is lacking is a RISC OS browser which will do this.

Communication

I shall retain the Abacusline website at <http://abacusline.demon.co.uk> for a short while until I get <http://www.abacusline.co.uk> up and running to my satisfaction. How short depends more on how many of my grandchildren's bicycles I have to repair than anything else!

My email address is <gerald.archive@ntlworld.com>.

The <archive@abacusline.demon.co.uk> may not be around much longer!