

Gerald's Column

by Gerald Fitton

SMS stands for Small Message Service. Most of the time people send text messages using SMS directly from their own mobile phone to the recipient's mobile phone. This month I shall explain how I send SMS text messages to a mobile phone directly from my computer.

Why use a computer?

Predictive text does help but, even compared with expert texters such as my grandchildren, I can type faster on a QWERTY keyboard than they can use their phone keyboards.

There are a few mobile phones such as the O2 XDA Exec which have a built in QWERTY keyboard but the prices of these sophisticated phones are a bit out of my league at the moment. Mind you I am tempted but only because I like gadgets!

So, without fear of (too much) contradiction I assert that the principal advantage of using a computer to send text messages to a mobile phone is that with it I can use my computer's QWERTY keyboard. There are other less important advantages; for example, it is cheaper.

O2 as an ISP

As I have described in earlier Gerald's Columns, not only is O2 a mobile phone operator but, like most phone operators, they provide an Internet service (ie they are an ISP) which can be used for viewing special websites (such as BBC mobile) suitable for phone screens.

What is not so well known is that once you have your O2 username and password you can use your mobile phone as a portable link to the Internet from any computer including a laptop or PDA (Personal Digital Assistant). As an aside, the reason why the O2 XDA Exec is expensive is that it is a PDA as well as a mobile phone - and I already have a PDA.

Paul Beverley has described how he uses his laptop and a PCMCIA card containing an O2 SIM to access the Internet from anywhere where there is an O2 signal. I have described how I connect my laptop to my O2 phone using a cable to do exactly the same thing. Also I can use a BlueTooth link from my PDA to my O2 phone as a more portable alternative.

The only serious disadvantage of using O2 as an ISP in this way is the cost of downloads from the Internet. Paul has a monthly contract which allows him (I think) 36 MB per month for £14.50 per month; I haven't been charged yet, possibly because I'm still on the introductory offer (or O2 have made a mistake). Otherwise, for sending and receiving emails and attachments as well as browsing, O2 as an ISP behaves rather like a broadband connection; mine runs at about 240 Kbps.

O2 as a Mail Host

In order to use O2 as an ISP you need a Username and a Password. When you sign up for an O2 phone this service is a free extra. You are given a free email address and mail box.

I was given the Username "abacusline" and the free email address abacusline@o2.co.uk. I'm not going to tell you the Password! I can tell you that I chose it myself; it is not a computer generated password such as my principal NTL password.

As I have said in earlier Gerald's Column articles, I recommend that you separate the functions of ISP and mail hosting. By this I mean don't use 'free' email addresses such as gerald@ntlworld.com. Invest in a personalised domain such as abacusline.co.uk and set up your mail boxes such as archive@abacusline.co.uk with your chosen host. It is not expensive. My abacusline.co.uk domain costs me about £25 per year.

Because I don't use 'free' email accounts I make little use of abacusline@o2.co.uk. I use accounts such as archive@abacusline.co.uk instead. Nevertheless, even though I don't use O2 for hosting my emails I do need the Username "abacusline" and my O2 Password in order to access my archive@abacusline.co.uk and other mailboxes via my mobile phone.

My O2

Those who are familiar with Windows will know of My computer, My documents, My pictures, My music, etc, etc. I think this is the derivation of the heading My O2 which O2 use to make available a whole range of services including the one I shall describe today, SMS using a computer connected to the Internet via any ISP.

The entry point to this service is the URL <http://www.o2.co.uk>.

When this is entered into a browser the O2 home page is displayed. The screenshot below shows just the top left corner of this home page.



I registered soon after I upgraded to my current Samsung Z500 mobile phone and that is how I became 'abacusline@o2.co.uk' and set up my O2 Password.

Clicking on "Sign In here" is the entry point for that part of the O2 website which they describe as "My O2".

Sign In

When the Sign In screen appears (look at the screen shot below) there is a bit of advertising on the left which includes "Send TXT messages to any mobile". It is this feature which I shall describe.

To the right of the advertising there is a couple of dialogue boxes for my Username and Password. Have a look at the screenshot below.

Sign In

To sign-in fill in your details below

User Name

Password

I have already filled in abacusline as my Username. After this I fill in my Password in the second box and then click on "Log me in" (not shown in this screenshot).

My everything

The screenshot shows the O2 mobile website interface. At the top left is the O2 logo. Below it is a navigation bar with three buttons: Home, Shop, and Mobiles & Tariffs. The main content area is a light blue box with a dark blue border on the right. It contains the text "Welcome back, Gerald" and "My O2". Below this are several menu items: "My Details", "My Mobile", "My Account & Online Services", "My Alerts", and "Sign Out". At the bottom left of the main content area is a white envelope icon. To its right is a dark blue box with the text "Communicate", "Send Text Messages", "Media Messaging", and "O2 Webmail".

When I click on "Log me in" another screen appears part of which is shown above.

The screen which is displayed has much more on it than I have shown in this screenshot including a "View My Bill" option which allows me to see how I'm getting on with my free minutes and texts. The last time I tried it this "View My Bill" was giving problems.

I might deal with some of these other features on another occasion.

The Compose screen

When I have clicked on "Send Text Messages" (below "Communicate" in the screenshot above), the screen shown below is displayed.

The screenshot below is the "Compose" screen.

By clicking on other words in this line you can, for example, buy texts at 5p each in blocks of 30 or look at the text messages you have sent from this site.

SEND TXT

→ Compose → Purchase → Inbox → Sent Messages → Create Templates → FAQs

Compose

→ Templates → DXNRE → X Rated DXNRE → Chat Up Lines → Jokes

To: +447890123456 → Address Book

Subject:

Use free TXT - you have 4 TXT remaining

Use paid TXT - you have 0 TXT remaining

Message:

The weather here is warm and sunny so I have watered all your flowers.
Gerald

Characters: 259 remaining, using 1 TXT Messages → What's This?

Enable Reply → What's This?

→ SEND ✕ CANCEL

Buy Additional TXT

Billed to your mobile phone account:

30 for £1.50 (5p/TXT)

Billed to your credit card or debit card:

30 for £1.50 (5p/TXT)

100 for £4.50 (4.5p/TXT)

500 for £20.00 (4p/TXT)

For use with Send TXT only.

→ BUY NOW

You will see that I have composed a simple text message to a fictitious mobile phone number. It is ready to send. All I need to do is to click on "SEND" at the bottom left of this screen and the SMS will be sent to the phone with that number. The phone to which I send the message does not have to be an O2 mobile phone or a fixed phone with the SMS facility enabled. Indeed, it does not have to be a phone at all! But that's another story.

Prices

It will not escape your notice that I have 4 free texts remaining.

I am given 10 free texts to send this way every calendar month. I have already used six this month. I used them to send SMS to a UK registered mobile phone (starts with +44) located in Spain (a friend on holiday). There is a charge for the international hop (charged to the recipient) in addition to the 5p per text charge.

I do have lots of free texts on my phone as part of my package; I never use them all. I haven't tried converting those free text messages to this computer account so I don't know if they are available via my computer. Perhaps some reader of Archive knows the answer?

Communication

Write to me with Archive things to archive@abacusline.co.uk.

You might like to try <http://archive.abacusline.co.uk> with Username "archive" and Password "amusement" (without the inverted commas) if you wish to download this and other articles I have written for Archive.

The articles are in Fireworkz format.

On the site is a RISC OS Fireworkz Reader (compare this with the Acrobat Reader) which you can download and then use to read these articles. If you have either Fireworkz for RISC OS or with Fireworkz for Windows you will be able to use that package to read these Fireworkz files.