boards from coast to coast in the night hours, and moved to the commercial Internet in the spring of '94.

That doesn't prove much except that I am older than dirt, cantankerous, suspicious and disinclined to get involved in a lot of the technological fads. And because of this, there are some things that I simply won't do over the Internet — 10 of them, to be exact.

Here's the list, and here are my reasons.

1. Public Wi-Fi. How many ways can you say, "stolen data?" Public Wi-Fi services, be they at a coffee shop, a hotel lobby or an airport, are simply not secure enough to trust with a business computer. The jury's still out on the subject of Wi-MAX, the next evolution of wireless Internet.

2. Instant Messaging. Most corporate IT departments ban the use of instant messaging over the Internet for the same reason. In recent months, detailed plans of the presidential helicopter Marine One were stolen from a company through a compromised IM client on an employee's laptop.

3. Twitter. This new, hip, text-based mini-blogging service is all the rage, but it does not have a business model. That is, it is living off fast-burning venture capital. I don't ever participate in a service if I don't know how they make their money, because all too often the answer is that they make money by selling my information to people who should not have it.

4. Plaxo, Linked-In, and all that. There are two problems here, one of which is the lack of a business model. The other is that I simply don't see the value. Most of the people who want to include me in their circle seem to be sales reps who want my money or people whose business cards I throw away whenever I clean out my desk. The people I need to keep track of, I know where to find.

5. Peer-to-peer networks. I know they have some legitimate uses, but the reality is that P2P networks are chock full of child pornography, illegal music and films, and

phony files with every manner of computer virus. 'Nuff said.

8. Forwarded email. Any time you see an email that encourages you to "send this to everyone you know," do the world a favor and simply delete it. These are generally years-old virus warnings you no longer need, or viruses themselves. And just for the record, Microsoft does not issue virus alerts, though they do have an anti-virus service.

9. Electronic Cards. If you think enough of me to send a greeting card, why not just send a real one? The electronic ones seem to me to be mostly cheesy, and all too often are a virus or phishing site hoping someone will be dumb enough to click on the link. I don't bother opening any of them.

10. Google anything. Google is unabashed in its business model. They glean every scrap of information they can about you, then slice and dice it so their advertising department can send you an ever more targeted barrage of ads. They track you online. They lay claim to the contents of the email in Google Mail accounts. They track your search queries. They track too darned much, and I'm frankly a little alarmed by it.

Lest you think I am just an old crank, there are lots of things I do online. I blog. I podcast. I personally kept Amazon.com in business, I believe, during the recent recession. I run half a dozen websites, live and die by email, and share my calendar over our local network. I love Craig's List (the For Sale section, not the "escort services"). I watch videos, record programs to my home DVR, and love being able to tether my cell phone to my laptop for good Internet connectivity on the road.

But privacy and security are critical issues for any accounting professional, and there are some things that you simply cannot do with a business computer. Or any computer on the same network as your business computer. Ever.

Reality Check

A compendium of ideas, products, rants and raves from the viewpoint of the author. Note that the author has no financial interests in any of the products mentioned. Feel free to disagree, or to share your ideas by sending them to davemcclure@cpata.com.

office with economy-minded road warriors.

[Thumbs Down] – Laser Printer Dust. As much as I love my laser printer, it is obvious that the residue can be a problem. It needs to be cleaned from the interior of the printer at intervals, and can be a mess if spilled. Now, though, comes even worse news. Health researchers are noting an uptick in medical problems related to breathing in the residue from laser printing. If this pans out, laser printers could be the asbestos of the 21st Century.

[Thumbs Sideways] – Online Giving. Most accounting firms have nonprofits for clients, so this is of interest. With the cost of fundraising spiraling upward, many nonprofits are using the Internet to spur contributions. The good news is that such giving can be very successful. The bad news is that it is not sustained. Online givers are far less likely to return regularly, and unless you can capture them via another means, they are often one-time donors.

[Thumbs Down] – Online Gambling. It seems like harmless enough fun — a little poker online, with the added inducement of being able to make a little money. But recent high-profile cases out of Australia and Europe have revealed numerous instances where the games were rigged. By working in teams with an insider, gamblers were able to read the hands of other players. Individual players did not lose a lot, but the illicit wins were huge in total. It just proves that, as my dad used to say, "If you are in a poker game for 10 minutes and have not figured out who the goat is … you are the goat."

[Thumbs Up] – Verizon's Femtocell. Femtocells are mini-cellular towers designed for offices that have a broadband connection but poor cellular reception. Connected to the Internet router, the femtocell (and what a stupid name for a cool technology!) runs the cell phone through the Internet. Sprint has had one on the market for a year now at a cost of $100 plus a $10 monthly subscription fee. Verizon has introduced one for a flat fee of $250. And AT&T is in final testing for its model, which should hit the marketplace by early summer.

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