Archive

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Cutting the need for 'stuff'

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BOSTON— For those who want to scale back on the need for office equipment altogether, a number of Internet companies are ready to provide the services you need for surprisingly little or no money.

All you need for most of them is a connection to the Internet - either dial-up or dedicated - and in some cases an e-mail account is also required.

Say you want to eliminate that fax machine. Los Angeles-based jfax.com will give you a free phone number in a randomly selected US city that will receive faxes, then bundle them up in e-mail attachments and send them to the e-mail box you specify.

You can then view or print these faxes, forward them, or file them for future reference.

A typical fax page takes up about 50K in your in box. You should know about any restrictions your provider may place on the size and number of messages you receive.

For $12.50 a month, you can choose which city the phone number will be located in from a list of 85 area codes in 60 US cities, as well as gaining the ability to send faxes for roughly 5 cents a page directly from your computer.

Since the list of cities includes such foreign hotspots as Paris, Berlin, and Osaka ($22.50 for Japan), you can establish a presence in a distant city for next to nothing. Your phone number also serves as a voice-mail service, turning incoming calls into e-mail (30 seconds will take up about the same 50K).

Alas, if you want to hear your messages by phone, the 800 service access will cost 25 cents a minute. But as Gary Hickox, jfax president and chief operations officer, points out, "You'll never have to deal with a paper jam again."

Suppose you next want to dump your ZIP/JAZZ drive. Freediskspace.com will give you 25 megabytes of online disk space you can access from any Web browser. Just the thing for backing up your critical data on your system, and also a handy way of moving data between work and home.

Freedrive.com, a nearly identical service, offers 20MB. If you want to use the Internet to really back up your system, www.i-filezone.com will rent you a full gigabyte of online backup space for $15 per month.

Finally, you might throw out your DayTimer and start using Yahoo's free "My Yahoo" service, which includes a handy calendar application with address book.

Best of all, using their TrueSync application, you can keep your online information "synced up" with Microsoft Outlook at home or at the office.

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