

# How I nearly met Bill Bryson

Karen Roem gets locked out of a training room, is saved by the world wide web – and almost gets talking to a world-famous author

## Wednesday 19 January

A girl's gotta keep up with technology... When I got to the client's training room this morning it was still locked. As usual, I was way too early, but I like to have plenty of time to set up the room, test things out and allow for the (inevitable?) last minute panic. So there I was, on the lookout for a man with a bunch of keys to open the door... Turns out they released it remotely. Welcome to the tech age!

## Thursday 3 February

Yesterday I helped a local charity troubleshoot their mail merge problems using Works Suite 2004. For more than four hours, we were sitting in an office slightly larger than a broom cupboard, but we cracked it and we felt pretty good about it. Today, my hubby sent me a text message to say that yesterday's customer rang to tell me 'I was absolutely brilliant'. This was unique in two ways: First that the customer rang to give unsolicited feedback. And second because my husband is using a mobile phone to stay in touch while I'm away on business. Apparently, I managed to convince him that mobile phones don't turn you into a loud-mouth phone user travelling by train... they just point out where they are sitting!

## Friday 11 February

Do you remember a time without the world wide web? My god, what did we do before Tim Berners-Lee came up with his hypertext program in the early 1990s? Well, thanks to his invention I just had dinner with somebody I used to work with at the Computer Lab some nine years ago. Her ad in the February online newsletter of Women at Work was just underneath mine, and a quick email confirmed she was the Kate. But that was only one part of today's successful use of the web. When I got back in the office (aka home) and checked my email, I found a message confirming my suspicion about an official looking letter I received earlier this week from the Data Protection Enforcement Agency in Blackpool. 'Final notice' it read, claiming that despite previous correspondence my business was still showing as not having registered its activities as laid out in the Data Protection Act 1998. Having no recollection of ever seeing previous correspondence, I got even more suspicious when I got to the end of the form and there was a demand for £135. So I searched the internet and found a warning on the Information Commissioner's Office (the old Data Protection Agency) website, listing my guys on their bogus list. Turns out the statutory fee for



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registering under the Data Protection Act is £35 a year, so if a letter demands more than that you can be certain it is a scam. So I threw the letter in the bin and didn't pay the fee! Sir Tim. My Hero.

## Tuesday 15 February

Not sure whether to laugh or cry. It's 5.30am and I've just sent off a couple of email messages in an attempt to stay ahead of the game. Within minutes I have answers from Australia and India. Thought email was supposed to be asynchronous. Don't they know that that does not require users to be logged in simultaneously?!

## Thursday 24 February

Love it or loath it, networking is a way to build relationships that can help grow your business. Suffice to say, I'm not a fan. Not that the very thought of walking into a room terrifies me, but I don't think you can

build a relationship that way. OK, it's not as bad as in the US, where two-minute 'speed networking' is thriving (a concept they're now trying to introduce in the UK), but still. However, as my local Chamber of Commerce had organised an informal networking evening at 'my' health and fitness club, I thought I'd give it a go. Still lots of chaps in suits, but on the bright side, one of the women asked whether I was a member of the 'junior networking group' (18-40s). And if that alone didn't cheer me up, I feel I might have drummed up some work from a local telecom business. Me, gloat? Never.

## Monday 28 February

I'm on my way to catch the 07:45 to London King's Cross to do some more work for a client I once met at an airport. (Who needs networking events?) Among the many commuters with their coffee and a newspaper is a man with two huge suitcases. 'Looks promising' I say, while walking past him. 'I'm sorry?' he replies. I look at him properly now and, oh my god, it's Bill Bryson! Why didn't I a) keep my mouth shut, or b) think of something a bit more exciting to say? Before I know it, I'm one of the sad characters in his next book! Must stop talking to strangers in busy public areas. But then again... I wouldn't be on my way to catch the 07:45 to London King's Cross to do some more work for a client I once met at an airport if I had not struck up a conversation...

Karen Roem is the founder of software training and support firm Roem Limited. Diary of a training consultant is an extract from Karen's Blog: [www.roem.co.uk/blog.html](http://www.roem.co.uk/blog.html)