



The technology onboard a superyacht today is truly mind-boggling, including internal networks, internet communications, and complex navigation systems. The maintenance and administration of the computer systems can be a job for a single person, but what do you do if your vessel isn't large enough to accommodate them, or they can't be on call all the time? Tork Buckley went on one new course in Amsterdam designed to teach the basics of IT systems for that very purpose.

An ETO is a new crew role. It is an acronym for Electronic Technical Officer: the 21st century Radio Officer. However, the role is more about bytes than radars – today onboard networks reach a level of complexity that would have been found in a large company ashore only a few years ago. Worse still, the complexity varies little between a 160-m and 45-m vessel, only scale changes. The job is an interesting one and there are fewer ETOs than jobs; any (ideally) Microsoft-certified geek seeking to exchange life in a cubicle for on a superyacht should contact Bond Technical Management (Bond TM). Of course, a downside is that an ETO is another person needing a bed, space and salary. For yachts under 60 m this is often a problem. Many yachts lack space for deck and interior crew, let alone one more engineer.

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It was with this in mind that Will Faimatea (former ETO and now founder of IT and AV company Bond TM) decided to offer a solution: a two-day course aimed at masters and chief engineers on non-ETO-equipped yachts. It teaches the basics of how networks operate and equips students to run basic fault finding and troubleshooting. “After the course,” Faimatea explains, “students will be able to self-manage (and) keep (the vessel's networks) running, and administer them”. In fact it is not only suitable for masters and mates, any crewmember could attend; though bear in mind when crew suddenly can't access the internet at 23:30 you will be called upon! Bond TM will add higher-level training for yacht IT in the future, but this is the Level 1 beta test course.

The Course

Faimatea invited six people, myself included, to attend the course at Bond's 24-hour remote support HQ in Amsterdam (the other in Sydney was a bit too far). Students were varied: three captains, a first officer and two chief engineers. They came from 65-m, 85-m and 90-m new builds and a magazine! With a broad spectrum of IT knowledge, all were familiar with operating computers and some had delved deeper into the hidden (and dangerous) areas. The first morning we assembled in Sloterdijk in a classroom equipped with six identical laptops attached (by WiFi and/or cable) through a switch to a server and internet router modem (AKA internet gateway). Our “Teach” was Herbert van der Westhuizen, with support from Faimatea and Vladimir Cintula, another former ETO who has worked on MY *Pelorus* and MY *Ecstasea*. The syllabus covers some 15 pages, and there is a condensed version of the syllabus on www.yotcru.com/BTMsyllabus. It was well worth studying in advance, though few on the course did but still coped well.



The course covered more topics than we can list here. We learned about administration; security awareness; differing types of operating systems (XP Pro: good! XP Home: bad! Vista: awful!!); types of network: workgroup is unsuitable and domains are suitable; and network infrastructure: defining and understanding what servers, clients, host gateways, routers, firewalls and switches are, what they do, where they fit, and how to navigate one. This requires understanding of testing commands (ping, tracert etc) as well as where things are on the network, which is defined by the IP address. This may be the most important topic – especially considering that some can be seen and others not, depending on which side of, for example, a firewall you are electronically. The internet is such an integral part of life but we are as unaware of how it works as we are of how electricity gets to a wall socket ashore. In this course we learned how it works both for browsing and how email mail gets from sender to recipient, and the function and necessity of an onboard email server was explained and justified.

What was the course like?

This course was hands-on; we were not only shown but also used various techniques, which was very popular with the students. Training culminated in

a highly stressful exercise on the second day. A student left the room while the others plotted and executed a fault in the network; they then returned, the scenario was given and they had to find and repair the fault. The practical session will be increasingly included in future courses. As Faimatea commented, “People think they know IT, but until you are left all alone to solve a problem – in a logical sequence – you don’t realise your limits.” The course was developed by four of Bond’s team with near 35 years’ yachting experience so it was totally superyacht-specific. The network architecture was as it would be onboard; the issues of real-life yacht IT operation were incorporated and made familiar to the students. Scenarios were typical: captain can’t access printer; crew can’t get internet; a guest needs to access the internet whose laptop is set up for onboard but can’t access their network back home (this is

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a very common problem that causes long-range issues for captain and crew). Oddly, the roles the students play onboard

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the ETO-less yacht. Faimatea commented at the end of the last day: "Too rarely is the question asked 'Will there be an ETO?' before a system is designed and supplied." He feels that without an ETO some degree of KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid!) should be applied to system design.

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are not as Faimatea envisaged (save one chief); two of their yachts will actually have ETOs. However, this emphasises the point that although useful for the non-ETO-equipped yacht, the course is also handy for those that will have one onboard. ETOs can't work 24/7 all year round and the knowledge would be useful for owner's representatives or captains specifying IT requirements on new builds. The course also offered surprises for the experienced; one student, Maxx Ainsworth, commented: "I really didn't know what to expect (but) learned a lot of things I thought I already knew. It (was) apparent that there was definitely a lot more to IT than meets the eye. I actually used this knowledge (on) my first day back in the office to fix an ongoing problem." In addition, it is a win-win situation for Bond when providing remote support; a knowledgeable, trained person onboard who speaks the jargon speeds troubleshooting, gets things working quicker and may even avoid the need for a call.

Of course you don't become an MS tech in two days, so it is vital that the network is properly designed and commissioned in the first place. Back onboard attendees will have a maintenance, not a set up, role. It is also imperative the network suits

Even a trained non-ETO can only spend some of his or her working day keeping the system up. I, too, echo Ainsworth's comments and found the course both useful and above all – despite its intensity – manageable in the 17 or so hours. A final unforeseen advantage of the two days was sharing of tips and tricks from Bond TM techs and amongst the students. I will share two: www.whatismyipaddress.com is great for finding your new IP address and use the "up arrow" to correct a Skype™ chat after you have sent it!

An AV course of similar format for officers, captains and engineers has been developed by Bond TM, and I will be attending this in October. To learn more about the IT and AV course held in Amsterdam email contact@bondtm.com.

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