

Hang ‘em High

A few months ago, I wrote a column about why I think Windows 2000 took so long to take off. I told a story about a customer with a small network and my not so well thought out upgrade decision. Based on my advice, they ordered some new PCs with Windows 2000 and it broke nearly every piece of application software in the organization. This was my fault because I should have done an inventory of applications first and checked each one for Windows 2000 compatibility. I didn't and we paid the price.

That column generated tons of email, some more blunt than others. Here is an excerpt from one of the most colorful:

Are you as big of an idiot as you lead us to believe?!

Implementing a solution before testing it out first in a test environment is ludicrous. I hope everyone reading your article knows never to hire you for anything more than keyboard or mouse replacement. I can't wait for the day when we get rid of PAPER MCSE's like yourself who are still stuck in the days of Novell and DOS based software.

As for PCAnywhere, Windows 2000 tells you not to install it unless it's the latest version and then install the patch. Again, testing is the key to success.

As for AOL 5.0, it actually breaks more things than any other software ever did. Anybody who installs AOL on a corporate network is a moron!

Anybody still trying to run DOS, Novell or any other tired old legacy software probably still uses a phonograph because they believe CD's and DVD's are a fad, and that they won't stick around for long.

You state that the fix is usually "the latest version of software". YES! You need to spend money if you are going to own/use a computer. Microsoft doesn't break anything, it just doesn't need to keep supporting old software for lazy people. Keep current and avoid the problems.

Well . . ., I'm guilty as charged, I guess.

A few clarifications are in order. Here is the decision making process we used to order the PCs. Dell's small business division was running a three-year, interest-free lease promotion. I heard about the promotion on a Tuesday and learned it was ending Friday. This customer had several aging PCs we were planning to replace in the next several weeks. When we learned about the promotion, we had to move fast to take advantage of it. We met Wednesday night and ordered 4 Dell PCs on the spot with Windows 2000 Professional. The rest of the story is history.

No excuses. I messed up. And it really was a dumb mistake because the customer ended up buying the PCs outright instead of leasing them, which eliminated our incentive to move fast.

Actually, I might be an even bigger dummy than the letter suggests, because I'll bet I make at least one mistake every day. I've written extensively about a few of them in this column and, believe me, I could write about lots more. I remember the time I blew away at least a month's worth of data for a department in a small college. Another time, I said some really dumb things to a customer that almost triggered a 7-figure lawsuit. Then there were a few really nasty weeks in the late 80s when I made what seemed like an entire IT department mad because I was so cocky. One time, I spent almost three weeks trying to make a LAN operate with obviously bad wiring and made the problem worse with poor customer relations skills.

By that sorry legacy, the letter writer is correct. I should be fired and hog-tied.

A long time ago, somebody told me, "The only people who don't make mistakes are the ones who don't try." It was probably right after I'd done something dumb. I never forgot that lesson, and over the years, I must have done an awful lot of trying because I've made more mistakes than I can count and I'm not finished yet.

Today, whenever I'm in a position to mentor somebody, I always try to teach the proper attitude about mistakes. The lecture usually goes something like this: "Don't be afraid to try things and make mistakes. I'll never hang anyone for making an honest mistake. Just learn from it and don't try to cover it up."

You see, I'll bet every reader of this column, at least every reader who tried something non-trivial, made at least one mistake in his or her career. If we fired everyone who made mistakes, nobody would be left to keep all those networks running.

On a more personal note, I'm now convinced CDs and DVDs will be with us at least a few more years, but I do still own a phonograph. I always called it a record player, because I had trouble spelling "phonograph".