



Computer God or Just Another Stupid User?

Nate Benson

In the last 30 years, a new breed of professional has evolved—the IT professional. You know the type only too well: He or she is usually the skinny, pale person with bloodshot eyes who never sees the sun. The IT professional is always in front of a computer, doing something that requires a 5,000-page manual, and becomes confused by answers other than yes or no.

Any company, small or large, has at least one or two of these IT professionals lurking around—people that the average computer user reveres. When called upon to perform their miracles, these IT professionals inevitably have titles such as “computer genius” or “Mr. Know-it-all” bestowed upon them. After all, these “computer gods” can return a malfunctioning computer to its former glory or can find that “lost file.” As users have grown dependent upon their computers and, therefore, on their company’s IT professional, IT professionals have become more confident—maybe a bit too confident.

SETTING THE SCENE

My firm does consulting work for a small company that recently hired a new operations manager. This new manager requested that we load specific applications on his computer. I duly noted the applications and passed this information on to my associate—who I’ll call *computer guy* (to protect the embarrassed).

The real story begins with computer guy sitting at his home computer, checking his e-mail messages. He was feeling pretty satisfied with himself; after all, he had just completed the miracle of breathing life into a new network for one of our clients: A new server, several workstations, an e-mail system, and Internet connections were all ready for work the following day.

Computer guy’s self-satisfied glow faded, however, when he opened an e-mail message sent from the new operations manager. The operations manager had sent the message to his supervisor, who then sent the message to his supervisor, and so on until the message was forwarded to computer guy’s boss, who finally forwarded the message to computer guy himself. I am sure you are intimately familiar with such a chain of command.

SEEING RED

When computer guy finally got past the chain of who forwarded the message to whom, he read the actual message. In the message, the operations manager complained that one of the applications he had requested was, in fact, not loaded on his computer. Of course, computer guy’s boss wanted to get the facts straight and make sure that the installation was completed before he called the operations manager back. (He would, after all, have to do a little PR work for the computer guy).

Confident in his ability to configure a system to exact specifications, computer guy felt he needed to defend himself to his boss. Consequently, computer guy immediately replied to his boss and launched into a bit of a tirade:

Just how stupid is this user? How hard is it to notice one icon in the system tray and one icon on the Quick Launch bar? Does the guy also need an icon on the desktop? What is this user, stupid? Do I have to go over there and click the icon for him? People like this don’t deserve to use a computer. There should be a law universally decreed that limits users like this to an Etch-a-Sketch.

In computer-guy humor, of course, this message translates to, “Well, duh, of course I loaded the application.”

LOOKING BEFORE YOU SEND

This story wouldn’t really amount to much more than a slight frustration if computer guy—who until this moment had been revered as an e-mail king—pulled the biggest rookie mistake in the entire computer world. With a single, experienced, swift, and I do mean *swift*, click of the mouse, computer guy’s secure little world came crashing down. Yes, you guessed it—Computer guy Replied to All!

If computer guy had immediately realized this mistake, he could have worked his technical magic and snatched this e-mail message back right out of midair. In his arrogance, however, computer guy never even thought that he could pull such a blunder—until he received a reply from the operations manager. Not surprisingly, the operations manager commented that he was going to talk with computer guy’s boss about the rude e-mail message.

RETURNING TO EARTH WITH A CRASH

With that single click, computer guy was reduced to a mere computing mortal, actually worse—a stupid user. He found himself in very unfamiliar territory: He had to dust off his people skills and apologize to the operations manager and everyone else in the e-mail chain of command. For all of you “computer guys” out there, just remember that one wrong click can reduce you to the unenviable position of being the subject of this column.

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