



In Your Words

When we started this column a couple of months ago, we were delighted to find that *Novell Connection* readers have had a plethora of humorous experiences while supporting networks around the world—and they were willing to share these experiences. This month, we are sharing some of our favorite reader-submitted stories. Of course, the names have been omitted to protect the embarrassed.

WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT?

In 1998, a devastating ice storm hit the city where I live. Ninety percent of the city was without power—the city was in a state of emergency. At the time, I was working for a local children's hospital as a network administrator. The hospital was one of the buildings hit with a major power failure.

During the crisis, I was running in and out of the computer room, making sure the servers, routers, and UPS were functioning on emergency power. Between trips to the computer room, I was running around the hospital making sure that the different departments—such as the emergency room and operating rooms—were still functional. To make matters worse, the generators were close to running out of fuel.

While I was in my office trying to make sure that critical services were running, I was interrupted by a doctor. She walked into my office and began screaming at me. She needed to print and her “stupid printer” was no longer printing. I tried to explain to her that with all that was happening, I did not have time to look at her printer. That didn't work. She lost her temper.

To pacify her, I went to take a look. It was the longest walk I have ever taken: She screamed at me all the way to her office. She screamed about how IS is never helpful, how we help everyone except the people we need to help, and so on.

When I got to her office, I opened the lid to her ink jet printer and removed the cartridge. She told me she had just changed it. The seal covering the ink holes was still on the cartridge!

CAN I GET SOME HELP HERE?

Working in a computer lab at a community college has afforded some fabulously amusing stories involving student questions. Here is my favorite:

The procedure for students to let us know they have a question is the simple “raise your hand” routine. On a particularly slow day, a student approached the staff area, visibly agitated. When we asked her what she needed help with, she fumed that she had been asking for help for 30 minutes but had been unnoticed by the staff.

We were puzzled by this complaint since we had seen only five or six students in the lab all day. It would have been impossible for us to have missed her raised hand. After following her back to the workstation, she showed me that she had been pressing the F1 key for help, but no one ever came.

CAN YOU SEE A LITTLE FLASHING LIGHT?

My favorite story happened at Royal Air Force Base Lakenheath, UK. We had a screamin' 36-terminal Burroughs minicomputer network. The keyboard on each dumb terminal had a polling light, which flashed whenever the minicomputer polled that terminal. The system was used almost exclusively by fighter pilots, whom everyone knows are the most able and intelligent people ever to walk the earth—at least most of the time. About once a week, a network support guy would have a phone conversation that would go something like the following:

User: My computer is dead.

Net Guy: Okay, there's a little polling light on the top right corner of the keyboard. Is this light flashing?

User (irritated at this trifle): No, it's not flashing; it's off. Now it's on. Now it's off. Now it's on again.

Net Guy (eventually being forced to interrupt): Ah, yes sir, it sounds as if the light is flashing.

This happened at least once a week for the entire five-year lifetime of the system.

THAT INFORMATION WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL 45 MINUTES AGO

It was a typical Monday morning; all of the network gremlins had apparently been loose on the weekend. I received a service call from a customer who was having a problem with his monitor. He claimed he could not see the color red on his screen. He was running an AutoCad program on which the main color is red.

I asked him to shut down the program and restart it. That didn't work. Next, I said it could be the video card or maybe the monitor itself. I told him the easiest thing to do was to get another known working monitor and hook it up to the PC. He went off, left me on hold, came back, and said the second monitor was doing the same thing.

Then, I suggested that we reinstall the video driver. I asked him if he had the drivers handy for the video card for that PC, and he said “Yes.” We rebooted in safe mode and deleted the video card from the device manager and rebooted. Still no red.

I then suggested we look at the color palette, and that solution didn't work either. My final suggestion was that it was probably the video card itself and that it would need to be changed.

At that suggestion, the user told me that he was going to call another person to talk to me—he was color blind. I had just spent 45 minutes on the phone with a person who was color blind and complaining that he could not see the color red. I spoke to the other person—we tested the program, and all was well.

Send your stories about humorous networking mishaps and misunderstandings involving users, colleagues—or even yourself—to editors@ncmag.com. ●