

TechRepublic's ultimate collection of "dumb user" stories

We know that it's not politically correct to make fun of or tease dumb users, but every support tech has a funny story about someone who just didn't get it. We also know that it's important for techs to blow off steam, and these humorous anecdotes are meant to do just that.

The following is a collection of the best dumb user stories we've published to date. Keep this document handy and open it when you're feeling frustrated or overwhelmed—or anytime you just need a good laugh.

The squeaky wheel gets the grease

"We see some pretty strange things sometimes, but this one 'took the cake.' I work for a lumber manufacturing company in the southern U.S. And I guess you have to work around some of these folks to understand, but down here, if something is squeaking, then you grease it. Period.

"I kept having a lot of problems with one of the PCs—strange things with the software, just odd stuff. I decided to pop the case one day, and there was oily gunk everywhere! I was puzzled as to where all this oil came from, so I asked the supervisor who used the machine. He replied, 'It was squeaking, so I oiled it.' This is the honest truth. The fan motor was making some noise, so he sprayed it several times with WD-40!"

Those things could be deadly

"I had a client who said her keyboard didn't work right. She would try to type, and it would type all the wrong letters. I replaced the keyboard, and then she said that one did the same thing. So I started thinking it was possibly a bad motherboard, but she said that when other people logged on to the network and were using the computer, it worked just fine, but for her, it typed garbage. Now, I know that there is nothing in a login script that will do this, so I asked her to show me what it was doing. While she was typing, I noticed her lovely sculpted fingernails, which were over an inch and a half long. So of course as she would try to hit one key, her fingernails were hitting the keys above. I recommended that as the office manager, maybe she should delegate typing tasks to her secretary."

It's raining cats and dogs

"Arriving at a private home to fix what was described as the erratic behavior of the family PC, I tried to question the owner as to exactly what was happening. 'Well, the only thing I know for sure,' she said, 'is that every time our dog starts barking at the neighbor's cat, the computer goes crazy.' It took me a few minutes to shake off the stupid look I must have had on my face and start the troubleshooting. I avoided asking any more questions fearing the answers would be as strange as that last one. About a half hour into the job, the monitor started flickering and the system hung up. Almost immediately, I heard the barking of a dog and had a hard time coping mentally with what was happening. At this point, the lady entered the room and said, 'Yes, that's what it does.'

"I was about to pack it in and for the first time give up when her husband came in and said, 'It's a good thing we have that electric fence or that cat would be a goner by now.' After making some inquiries, I discovered that when the dog spotted the cat, it would run to the edge of the property and activate the electric fence, which was controlled by a transmitter that was very conveniently located on the corner of the desk, beside the computer."

Clean as a whistle

"I was working with Gateway at the time of this call. A customer stated that he had followed the previous tech's suggestion on cleaning his system up prior to formatting his system. He further stated that he felt that this might have made it worse. I asked in which way. He stated he took the box outside, opened it, washed out the dust with the hose, and let it dry. 'But when I plugged the thing back up,' he said, 'nothing happened.' This is a true story."

Beta or VHS?

"I work at a company that provides support for a number of different titles, one of which is a CD-ROM multimedia presentation that contains many AVI and video files on how to perform certain tasks. I received a call from a woman who was quite upset and complaining that the videos were not working at all. After a few minutes of gathering some information from her, I asked about her computer system information. The woman replied, 'Oh, my computer isn't

working right now. I put the disk into my VCR so I could watch the videos.' This is truly one of the most unusual calls I've received in almost 10 years of doing technical support for software."

The Corsican monitors

"I got a call from a user who informed me that she and another user had decided to rearrange their office and that after doing so, their PCs no longer worked. I investigated and found that when she turned on her PC, there was nothing on the monitor (it did have power). I asked them if they had disconnected anything during their move and they said no, that they had just moved their desks and then the PCs without disconnecting anything. Their only problem was that when they moved their PCs, they put their monitors on the wrong desks. I didn't see anything on the first monitor because it was connected to the PC on the other desk. When they turned on their PCs at the same time, they thought their computers were working but their keyboards and mice were bad!"

At least she's loyal to her brand

"One day, a lady called and wanted me to check her dial-up networking settings. As I talked her through TCP/IP settings, I asked her to put a checkmark beside Use Default Gateway On Remote Network.

"I can't do that," said the lady.

"Yes, ma'am, just put the cursor on the small box next to Use Default Gateway On Remote Network and press the left mouse button.

"I can't do that," she replied again.

"Do you see the small box next to Use Default Gateway On Remote Network?"

"Yes," she said.

"Why can't you select it?"

"I don't have a Gateway; I have a Packard Bell," she explained."

Check one, check two...

At my previous job, I was the only support person in a company of 40 or so employees; many days I could barely make it down the hall without someone hailing me to their workstation with a problem or question. One day a particularly high-strung young lady stopped me in my tracks with a frantic plea for help; she'd just flipped it on, but her monitor was blank...pitch-black...nothing whatsoever on the screen. As we walked to her desk, I was treated to way too much information about how far behind she was in her work....the implicit message being "fix it and fix it now". Well, I took a first look and, sure enough, nothing was doing on her computer, which puzzled me for half a second. Then I turned the CPU on and gently reminded her that the computer, as well as the monitor, must be turned on each day. Then I walked away as fast as I could so she wouldn't see me rotflmao. *—Melissa L.*

It's all in the handshake

We recently hired a new sales rep to sell Internet enterprise software. Last week he asked me a question about our product and wanted to know what a browser was. Unless he is one hell of a sales guy, I don't see him doing well in this business. *—Dennis B.*

Where does the thread go?

A woman working for us kept complaining that her mouse would only move an inch or two on the screen and then just stop and she said the buttons on the mouse were impossible to use. After several visits by our on-site support people who swore there was nothing wrong and two mouse replacements, I insisted the technician have her demonstrate the problem. (We are a 24-hour operation Hotel/Casino, and the user wasn't usually on-shift when the technicians were available to work on the equipment). The tech called me back absolutely hysterical. Turned out the woman, who works in the middle of the casino, had the mouse on the floor and was pushing it around with her bare foot because she thought it looked just like her sewing machine peddle. She works with at least 3 other people who use mice on their workstations within 5 feet of her but she apparently never thought to use her mouse the way they used theirs. *—Patricia F.*

Alphabet soup

I had a call from a user who wanted to clean his keyboard. I applauded his self-reliant nature and told him to just use any standard cleaning solution with a damp rag, and to be sure and dry it thoroughly. Well I guess I am the dumb user because I was not specific enough about what type of cleaner to use. The particular user grabbed the nearest can of brake cleaner and managed to melt his keys together into one big grotesque deformed alphabet palette. He called me back shortly to ask if I had any spare keyboards lying around. I knew right then... something was wrong. He would not admit to anything; I had to find out from his cubicle neighbor. Needless to say it required an e-mail to the entire staff explaining the perils of brake cleaner on plastic. —**Darrin McL.**

What a drip...

Wow is that computer smart! Let me preface this story by saying I'm in the Army and assigned as the Signal Officer for non-signal battalion. Recently while we were in the field (in the woods working out of a tent), enduring a merciless night of pounding rain, one of our more senior officers came to me with a problem. He had been watching me meticulously wrap all our computers in garbage bags to ensure they didn't get soaked by the notoriously leaky tent we worked out of when he called me over to check his laptop. He proceeded to tell me that he knew there was water in his laptop even though I had found none when I checked it previously. Try as I might I couldn't convince him it didn't have any water in it. He was so sure in fact that he bet me a beer, which is quite a strong endorsement among army guys in the field. "Prove it," I demanded. It's right here" he gloated, "look at this little faucet symbol underneath the screen, it obviously means there's water in it!!!" Because the laptop display under the monitor showed a small faucet with water dripping from it he just knew the machine was telling him it had water in it. Who says computers are only as smart as their users! —**5158sig0**

Experts in their field

This is a good one; especially considering the situation. We had a user (management level accountant) who was really fascinated with Excel. She told one of our clerks, "Look, you can move the cursor in Excel and the left box (name box) will tell you where you are!" She was totally clueless on what a function was, too. Boy, that's a POWER USER! —**Anonymous**, Data Processing Technician

Throwing out the baby with the bathwater

My favorite was a few years ago, when DOS was still king. A court reporter I did work for called me at home one Saturday morning. She couldn't get her WordPerfect to save her document; a very BIG document that was due at a lawyer's office on Monday morning. She had been working on the document for about 12 hours. I made a trip to her home, and she explained to me that she had tried to save the document but received an "Out of space" message, so she went into her WP file manager and deleted a bunch of files to make room for her document. She was sure she didn't need any of the old files, since their names weren't familiar to her. Among them was WP.exe—the WordPerfect program. Since it had to call itself to run the save routine, or the file manager routine, or anything else except text creation, she was stuck forever between the proverbial rock and hard place. No way to save, no way to shell out to restore WP.exe, no way to even print what she had typed in—all 400 pages. We print-screened all 400 pages, gave it the last rites, and rebooted to restore her WP files. She did, however, learn a new respect for file names she didn't recognize. —**Tony M.**

Where's my modem?

I work at an Internet help desk and get calls you wouldn't believe. One lady called and said she had been signed up for Internet access for over a month and was wondering when I was going to send her modem to her. Once I explained that she had everything she needed and walked her through the settings, she was online within minutes. —**Vicki W.**, Information Technology Consultant

The drive to succeed

Hi there! I have two stories, but they are from the same company. How this company stays in business is beyond me. I do sales, installation and support for a recruitment company. The owner is a lady and her husband works for her. He is totally computer illiterate and constantly on the phone to me for help. One day when I wasn't available, one of my colleagues tried to help the poor guy who was having difficulty hiding his task bar in Windows 98! My colleague tried for about five minutes to get him to click right on the taskbar. At one stage he missed the right button, hit the center button and then the left button and exclaimed: "Oops, now I've clicked a double-click!" My colleague packed up laughing and had to think quick to explain to our "Dumbest Award Winner" why he was laughing. The second story happened some weeks later when I was on site to investigate a problem on an old 486. The clerk operating this computer is not much cleverer than her boss' husband and does many things which are totally unnecessary. The best one I saw was mapping each shared drives or directory from three other workstations over and over, up to a point where she had almost used up the entire alphabet! When I inquired about this she merely replied: "I was scared of running out of drive space, so I just added some more." -*Hein R.*

"I haven't done anything differently"

Three quickies: #1. Having worked support for 9 years, I have had: one call where printer was not plugged in, one call where phone line was plugged into the NIC card (they had no modem, lots of calls about "Invalid System Disk," lots of calls about speakers not working (plugged into wrong jacks). I usually save the obvious "is it plugged in" question for the appropriate time, which is when diagnostics leads me to that possibility. Diagnostics normally make it apparent within a minute or two. The more difficult resolutions involve issues where the customers "didn't make any changes" to their system, and then during the conversation, I find they have added boards and software right before it stopped working! I suspect you have already read the joke re: NOSMOKE.COM. However, if you have not, just use your search engine to find it. It is worth reading. -*WSofisle*

How many numbers in "password"?

After migrating from Vines to NT, all user passwords were set to password. One user called and needed help logging in to the domain. After going through all the normal routines, and checking to ensure that this user's account was not locked out, I instructed the user (once again) to type the password in lower case, to which she replied "What about the number?" -*Jim M.*, System Analyst

No permanent damage

My first story doesn't sound that dumb. Please remember that the "user" in question is a computer consultant/contractor, who is paid a great deal more than me to do a better job than me, because he "knows" more than me...

"I can't find the site I want, and I've checked my search criteria a dozen times over."

Have you tried using the actual address?

"No, I don't know what it is."

Look at your search criteria.

"Oh yeah, that might work."

My second is about a genuine dumb user. The call came in.

"My printer doesn't work, can you come and have a look at it?"

Hmm, you're right. When was it last working?

"Yesterday."

What have you tried to do?

"Well I plugged it in this morning, there was a loud bang, and now it won't work."

A loud bang? I would have thought a better description would be "I blew up my printer."

Did you make sure the power was off before you plugged it in?

"No, I never do."

After an hour of poking about inside the PC I found the printer's OK, but they blew the printer port and both serial ports. The PC still works, but no mouse or mainframe connection, and they couldn't print. I don't know why it wasn't destroyed completely (considering the two serial ports were on separate cards, both on the motherboard—meaning the motherboard would have taken the brunt of the power surge).

"Can you fix it (immediately)?"

The damage the "bang" did to the power lead was that the metal earth pin had been melted. I was surprised she didn't do any more damage (like blow fuses, blow her hand off, or destroy the printer). I would like to say that HP LaserJets are good quality printers though. I have a question for you. How come dumb users never actually manage to do permanent damage to themselves? -**Warren D.**, Assistant Manager (IS)

Train the trainer

Dumbest user huh??!! Well we had a trainer on site training users on the new billing system we use here and she was completely neurotic, any slight problem and she wanted you there within milliseconds. Anyway after about three days of plodding backwards and forwards I got a call "I'm trying to log in and the cursor is just whizzing across the screen *PANIC,STRESS* "Anyway I arrived to be greeted with the cursor sure enough whizzing across the screen, and the trainer foaming at the mouth about 11 people to train and if it's not working then she will only be able to train 10 of which I replied "Well take your notepad off the spacebar then!" to be greeted by rapturous laughter from the training group at the trainer!!!!. That's what I call justice! And funnily enough I didn't get another call again! -**Paul N.**, PC Support Analyst

Hello? Hello?

Our tech was on the phone with a user in one of our regional offices talking them through setting up a new laptop system they received. Our tech was trying to get the user to cable the laptop system up to the LAN. The user explained that there was no data port for the cable. The only port the user saw was the one the phone was plugged into. The tech continued trying to describe the data port, but the user continued stating the only port he saw was the one the phone was plugged into. To prove his point, while still on the phone, he unplugged the phone from the jack. I not sure how long it took before the user realized he had been disconnected. -**Douglas L.**

Scanning problems

About a month ago I received a support call from a user who claimed to be having trouble with her new scanner. Apparently a member of our support team had installed it while she was at lunch and it "just didn't scan anything." After asking her if it was powered along with the usual check-outs, I told her to start the scan program and click on scan in an attempt to scan in a test page. No luck. She said she could hear it working but the image it produced was black. I decided I would be better off seeing the situation for myself and told her "I'd be right up." She agreed and said she would continue to try and make it work herself while she waited. When I arrived at her office the problem was immediately apparent. Picture the scene yourself: a very frustrated young woman pressing a magazine cover firmly against the monitor in total confusion. I did my best to contain the evil pleasure I took while explaining to her the proper workings of her new flatbed scanner. -**Jason K.**

Polly want a cable?

I am a consultant who works with smaller and sometimes technically impaired businesses. One day I received a call from a client stating that his modem did not work and he couldn't connect to the Internet to get his e-mail. Since the vast majority of his business transpired over the Internet, the problem needed to be addressed quickly. I arrived on site and began running diagnostics on the system and the modem. It appeared that everything was working correctly. I spent almost two hours trying to find out why the modem would respond to a diagnostic command yet would not dial. In a fit of exasperation I stated that I would take the modem back to my office and get him a replacement until I could isolate the problem. As I

went to disconnect the serial cable, I noticed that one wire had been severed. When I asked if he had any dogs or cats in his home office he replied negatively but seemed somewhat embarrassed. It seems he does have a pet cockatoo that he would let loose in his office for exercise. I wonder if this bird had a taste for plastic? ;o) As soon as I replaced the cable, things immediately began to work and I left with a smile and one thought on my mind. Who was really technically impaired that day, me or my client? At least now I always check my cables...and my pets... -*Tim M.*

Lefty loosy, righty tighty

I'm a helpdesk technician for a large company here in Philly. Recently, a remote user called in asking for help on how to remove the monitor cable from the back of the PC. She said that her husband had tried pulling it out, her 19 year old son tried and even her next door neighbor tried to remove the cable from the PC. None could remove it, she said. So I asked, "Do you see those two round knobs on the side of the plug?" "Yes," she said. "Well, unscrew them counter clockwise," I said. Next thing I heard were shouts of joy from the people congregated around the PC. -*Fernandez*

Eliminating redundancies

When I first started, I was administering a 30 user Novell 4.1 LAN in a mid-sized company. We were on a single server, and ran applications from the same directory where the shared data was stored. When the users would log in, they would get mapped to this directory three times, each time a little further down the directory structure. Well one day I got a phone call from a VP who was in a panic. He was obviously bored and was browsing the network drives. He noticed he could see some of his data on each of the network drives just in a different place. He interpreted this to mean that there was more than one copy of his stuff on the network and being a helpful fella, he deleted what he thought to be redundant directories, and was very upset when his data completely disappeared. Thank goodness for the old Novell salvage utility! -*Michael K.*

Tight squeeze

I had a user ask me for a floppy to back-up a file off of her hard drive. She then asked where to insert the floppy. I told her to insert it into the small slot that's about the same size as the disk itself. Unfortunately for me, I was unaware she had an external Zip drive. She decided to ram the floppy into the Zip drive as far as it would go. She then called me asking why she couldn't read anything off the floppy. -*Mike P.*

Advanced data storage

I haven't done user support for over a year, thank God. Since coming to my new job, I've been a great big network engineering nerd, so my stuff isn't too fresh, but dumb is dumb. These stories are true. I wrote them down as best as I could remember it right after it happened because I wanted to make sure I remembered it.

User: "Oh my god, I've got a non-system disk error! I need a new computer now!!!!"

Me: "Is there a floppy in your drive?"

User: "What's a floppy? Aren't you going to bring me a new computer?"

Side note, user was on fastest machine available on the market at that date. Someone told these users that calling the techs can get you a new computer because they don't always feel like fixing it. The company I was working for was very lazy, so this was essentially true. Why worry about troubleshooting when you can give a new machine and throw a clean image on the broken one? Anyway, back to the story.

Me: "They're the small, plastic diskettes you save your data on."

User: "Oh. Well I don't use any of those."

Me: Silently pulling out my hair because it's going to be one of those calls, "OK, could you check the drive for me?"

User: "I don't listen to CD's at work. So are you going to get me a new machine?"

Me: "I understand. Could you check the drive above the CD?"

User: "OK."
Me: "Is there anything in it?"
User: "How can you tell?"
Me: "Press the little button by the side of the drive. If anything pops out, there is a disk in the drive."
User: "The message is gone!!!!!!!!!!!!!! But now the light on my monitor is orange."
Me: Banging head against the wall.
"Did you press the round power button?"
User: "Yes."
Me: "The power button is on the left hand side of the computer. I want you to press the little rectangular button on the right side of the computer, then press the power button again."
User: "The CD player won't open if you don't have the computer turned on"
Me: "What's your location? I'll come on over?"
User: "Are you going to bring me a new computer?"
I drove 25 minutes to another office to fix this lady's computer. There was a disk in the drive, by the way. When I showed it to her, she just replied, "Oh yeah, that's how we all store our data." And no, she did not get a new computer. That's why I'm an engineer now at a respectable firm and my colleagues at the old place are still doing level 1 support.

"War Games"

I had a user ask me once, "How do I get my computer to talk?"
Me: "I'm not exactly sure what you mean."
User: "Talk, have conversations. Like in that movie, 'War Games'".
Me: "That was a fictional movie. We don't have the technical capability to do that here."
User continues to argue that it can be done, because his cousin has it on his home PC. I later find out that the cousin is blind, so he has some kind of device that reads his email and documents and what not to him (sorry, I don't know what it's called). Someone from the user's family came to the office and set it up on his PC for him (I don't know if it was hardware or software, never saw it, didn't care to). Anyway, the user got what he wanted, but I don't think he wanted what he got. I get a call to support his new talking PC. Apparently, he was using this talking deal to look at Web pages and it was reciting line after line of HTML code. I heard it over the phone, "Less than, capital H, 1, greater than, hello, less than, backslash, capital H, 1, greater than". It took all self-control not to laugh at him. I sure wasn't going to support it. He had me on speaker phone, and I received applause from his cubicle mates when I informed him that non-standard items is grounds for me to take away his computer and give him a typewriter.

I worked at an ISP in early 1995 when there was a sudden boom of morons purchasing PCs for home use and wanted to get online. I got at least one call a week where someone paid for their service, had all the proper settings on their machine, but still weren't able to connect. The answer to the problem was always a) didn't plug in the phone line, or b) didn't even own a modem. You don't have to be a computer guru to check to make sure you have the necessary equipment before paying for an ISP. —**Anonymous**

More password fun

I was helping my sister-in-law establish a Web e-mail account [she's a real blonde by the way]. When we finally made it to the entry that asks you for a question in case you forget your password, I explained to her what it was for, I then asked her to type it in, the question was encrypted and I couldn't see it, It then occurred to me to remind her of something..."you need to know the answer to the question", she immediately deleted her entry, and we timed out not soon after and had to start over again. —**Doc**,
Systems Engineer

Lost cause

A user called in regarding a problem with an Excel worksheet. After attempting to troubleshoot the problem with the user for quite a few minutes, it was clear the user should not be allowed to use Excel or

even her PC for that matter. Without remote control available, I asked the user to send the file to me at my e-mail address [omitted]. She then asked if she would be able to send the e-mail to me because she was on an IBM computer. —**Danny C.**

The infamous any key

I am an electronic tech for one of the biggest retail chains in the world and have had quite a few funny questions presented. I suppose that we take for granted that everyone is computer literate up to a point, but it's not so. I remember two incidents that I would like to share. The first was when I received a frantic call from one of my fellow associates that she needed help with her program. She said, "I've looked and looked but I cannot find the 'any' key. Where is it?" The second was from a manager who wanted me to order him another coffee cup holder for his computer. I said excuse me but I'm not sure that I understand what you're asking for. He went on to explain that it was real neat how it worked. Every morning when he turned his computer on his coffee cup holder would come out, but he had broken it and really would like to have another. Think about it. —**Fgask1949**

And the ever-popular coffee cup holder

I was working tech support for a major corporate-level printer manufacturer and received a call from a user complaining that her printer was smearing toner all over the page. In fact, she told me, in the *three months* she had it, it's always done that. My first thought was that the envelope levers were flipped, so I had her open the left side of the printer to look. I asked her, "Do you see the small gray levers under the big blue levers?" "No," she replied. "Are they behind this orange thing that says 'remove this'?" And of course her next question was, "Should I remove it?" —**Warren H.**

Repeat offender

My users are always guaranteed to make me laugh but one is really special. Here is her story via her help desk ticket history! First ticket: "User can't log in." I call and tell her to be sure she is using the correct user ID—her first initial and the first seven letters of her last name. Her response "...and what is that?" Second ticket: "Scanner is only scanning half a page." I arrive and take a look and pull the document back up on the screen. Her response, "Golly how did it get down there?" Third ticket: "Your software won't print." (Notice the "your") Again I make the trek to her work area, walk to the printer and retrieve the printed document. "Gee where did you find that? I swear I looked!" Fourth ticket arrived late today: "User is in new department and this computer doesn't like her network password." I know the help desk is howling and I can't wait till tomorrow morning to see what this turns out to be. —**Another Anonymous Tech Support Person**

The blinky thing

A little over a year ago, I came across the user that defines computer illiteracy. I took him to DOS prompt because he could not use any Windows editors. I get him into the DOS Editor. We make the changes to the config.sys. He says, "Hey, something is wrong here." I ask him what is wrong—to describe it to me. His answer is: "I move the blinky thing and I can't stop that dash from following it." I ask him to not move the blinky thing and ask him if the dash is at the bottom or middle? He says it is at the bottom. "Okay, that is normal." —**Roby M.**

It's different in Canada

I had a UK user call me up the other day asking what cables they required for their laptop when traveling to Canada., i.e., for his external mouse & floppy drive. He also added that he did not know what make his laptop was and could I tell him...Try opening your eyes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! —**Tuli**

My arrow won't move

I work for a holding company that supports several hundred employees. One day I get a call that a user's mouse is no longer working. I run through the normal battery of tests (Have you moved your computer,

possibly unplugging the mouse, etc.). After having her check everything I could think of I thought I should personally examine the situation. As I approached her desk she says "see my little arrow won't move". I tried to hold back my laughter and instructed her to let go of her stapler and use the mouse instead. Another satisfied customer. -**Jack A.**

Something doesn't add up

Everyone is familiar with the standard response of "I can't find the 'any' key". Well I have one that is almost as priceless. I got a call one day from a senior manager at a previous job who was having trouble completing an upgrade to one of her programs. The message that was being displayed was press any key and she was pressing the enter key and this was having no effect. She even used the mouse to position the arrow over the button and hit enter, still with no results. Well I knew that she could use the mouse to click the button, but I suspected her keyboard may have been unplugged so I told her I would come to her office and take a look. When I asked her to show me the problem, I almost hemorrhaged trying to keep a straight face. You see, on her desk right beside her keyboard was her adding machine. Yep, that's right, one of the new ones with an enter button in place of an equal sign. Keeping the straightest face I could and coughing quite a bit as cover, I completed the install, moved her adding machine to the other side of the desk, and blamed it on those ever present Windows glitches. You see, she wasn't just the world's dumbest user, she was also a SENIOR MANAGER! Thanks. Have a nice day. -**Dave R.**, Information Management Support

The power of power

One of our office personnel was complaining about the fact that she had problems with her printer. She couldn't print anything from MS Word. She keeps trying and trying but the printer just is not working and she wants a new one right away. So, before considering her request, I take a quick look at her machine to notice she has 35 copies of the document in the print queue (obviously deciding that if it didn't work hitting the print button over and over was going to make it work) and the power light is not on. I hit the power button, informed her of the marvels of electricity and walked away. No, I didn't tell her how to clear out the print queue and I know she was too embarrassed to ask. -**Anonymous**

Hungry computer

Several years ago, one of my customers called and complained that his Altos minicomputer "ate" diskettes. I told him that this was not possible but he insisted—the computer had already swallowed a lot of them. After some discussion it showed that he had put the diskettes in the slot between the tape and diskette drives! Remembering this still gives us (and the customer) a good laugh. The best was when we visited his company to empty the computer from diskettes.... -**Stefan B.**

Where IS that icon?

One day a particularly technologically challenged individual called me for help. Fortunately, someone I knew was there when he made the call, or I never would have heard this little gem. Bear in mind, this individual has been using PCs to do his job since MS-DOS was just a pup. I asked him to look for the MS-DOS prompt icon on his desktop. After a very long pause the user reports back "I don't think I have one of those. I can't find it anywhere!" My acquaintance told me later that the in-duh-vidual was furiously sliding the papers around on his desk, trying to find the MS-DOS icon under the papers on his "desktop." -**Greg B.**

It's not always the user who's at fault

We work in a university and to give our team a bit of slack we encourage all our students to e-mail support questions to us rather than knocking on our office door. One lad met me in a corridor just as I was trying to leave one evening and said he had a problem. I told him that he should e-mail me and left. This happened on numerous occasions, always as I was walking out of the building. The conversation would go something like : Him: "Oh, I'm still having that problem with my..." Me: "Look, I asked you to e-mail me,

I haven't received it yet so I haven't fixed your problem." Him: "But I..." Me: "Look I can't deal with it now, e-mail me." Him: "Ok," walking away dejectedly. After about 6 days of this I received an e-mail from one of his colleagues apologizing but telling me that his friend's e-mail was broken. Needless to say after I fixed it, I received about 10 e-mails from the poor guy very politely asking if I could do something about his broken e-mail. —**Anonymous**

Fun with users

We used to love winding up our users when resetting their passwords, a favorite was to reset the poor user's password to DONTKNOW. Here's the conversation: "Hi, what did you reset my password to?" "DONTKNOW." "What do you mean you don't know, didn't you reset it?" "Yes." "So what is it?" "DONTKNOW." "What!" "DONTKNOW." "Why don't you know?" "Your password has been reset to D O N T K N O W " (spelled out very loudly on the phone so that their colleagues nearby would hear). Drivel & abusive language would always follow from the user for a while. We always replied with the standard: "We reset it because you didn't know it—seemed pretty logical to me!" Please treat this as ANONYMOUS to protect the innocent! —**Anonymous**

The flip side

You may not believe this one. I had a hard time trying not to laugh. One of the user's functions was to print on pre-printed forms and distribute them. The forms were in a box and were to be loaded into the paper tray of a laser printer. I received a call from a user at one of our ten sites. She had been printing for a year now with a LaserJet onto the pre-printed forms. The alignment was crucial. She called one morning (after the first cup of coffee) and told me she didn't want to complain, but the forms were placed into the boxes in the wrong direction. I wanted to confirm and asked, "You mean some are in one direction and the forms change direction partially through the stack?". She said, "No, the forms are in the wrong direction in the box." My reply to that was "You mean they are upside down?". She said "No the forms are in the wrong direction when I remove them from the box." I wanted to tell her to take them from the other side of the box. Or perhaps, remove the forms from the box and click her heels three times and say, "There's no place like home...". —**Dwayne**

Stolen keys

I was employed as Network Administrator for the local school system when this happened. My responsibilities also included handling help requests from teachers and faculty. I had been at work for about an hour when I received a call from one of our oldest teachers. She knew nothing about computers and the district had just purchased a new computer for her. It had been in her classroom for two days. She reported that someone had stolen the keys from her keyboard!! I didn't know what to tell her so I told her I would be right over. I wanted to see this one for myself. I had never heard of anyone stealing keys off the keyboard. When I got to her room and looked toward the computer, I had to consciously keep myself from bursting out in laughter, which I knew would hurt her feelings. Without saying a word, I walked over to the computer, picked up the keyboard, and turned it right-side up. Someone had flipped the keyboard over. I glanced at her quickly, and with a small smile on my face I quickly left. As soon as I was outside the building I had to laugh my head off. She later thanked me for not making her feel more foolish about it, and now uses her computer more, and a lot better, than most of the younger teachers in our District. —**Doug P.**

Wrong slot

One morning I received a panicked call from a client, saying that she had put a CD into the CD-ROM drive, but now it won't come out. I wasn't supposed to be into the office for another hour and a half, but such is the life of a consultant. When I got to her office I asked her to move so I could take a look at the computer, she responded that she had put the CD into another machine. I don't remember why anymore, but that's irrelevant. We walked into another room and she pointed to a machine. I looked at the machine, looked at her, looked at the machine again, looked back at her again...and said "That computer doesn't

have a CD-ROM drive in it!" She had put the CD into a 5 1/4" floppy drive! I ended up removing the CD with a pair of tweezers. –**Ryan G.**, Network Specialist

Userids

I run a small campus network and a computer lab that is used by close to 300 K through 8 students and teachers. To make things simple I have generic userids and profiles set for up for each grade (i.e. Grade 1, Grade 2, etc.). The teachers, of course, have individual userids and home directories. No matter how many in-services I give the teachers, I still get asked to come and see why their "password won't work". Inevitably, I watch over their shoulders as they carefully type in their password, while leaving the User Name box set to Grade 5! –**Sharon P.**

Shut the door

I've been in support for years, but by far, the best one I had was about a guy having trouble with his floppy drive. This was in the days of the 5 1/4 floppies. He kept trying to access the floppy, but always got an error. I proceeded to ask him if the door was closed. Maybe I should have specified the "drive door". I heard him put the phone down, walk across his office, and shut the door. When he came back, I was in tears, and had to call him back because I couldn't contain my laughter anymore. I'm not sure if he noticed though... –**Gaspare**

Plug it in

We have a user that is a director of the department. I received an issue to go help get the user on the network (a notebook) I received the same thing about a day or two later. What I put into the issue to resolve this was "Once again it helps to plug the Cat 5 cable in." –**Henry S.**, Computer Technician

Tough wrapper

A few years ago, we had a client that had just bought a Unix system from us. We shipped the system preloaded and all the client needed to do was connect the cables and turn it on. The client called a local tech in to connect the cables and the system booted with no problems. After a short while the client needed to install an update on the system, so we sent the client some floppy disks. The client kept complaining that the disks were hard to take out of the wrapper and put in and take out of the computer. None of the disks would work. Finally we sent the client a set of disks that I personally had tested. Again, they did not work. We called a technician out to check on the problem with the floppy drive. When he arrived the client was out on an appointment but he used his own disks to verify there was nothing wrong with the drive. He could not test the disks that I had sent out because the secretary could not find them. I finally asked the client to mail me back a set of bad disks. When they arrived, I couldn't stop laughing. The client had taken the disks out of the black protective plastic sleeves and tried to use them. Most of them were very bent. –**Anna**

Is this thing on?

I am the only IS person (NT 4.0 network) for our company of about 45 users. One day I got a call from a user who we always have problems with. The receptionist had been called off so she was working out at the front desk. She wanted to know if I could transfer her personal documents over the network from her computer to the one at the front desk. I told her to just log in as herself, not the receptionist, since I have roaming profiles set up. She said there were a bunch of files open and she didn't want to close them all, log in again, and open them all back up. I then remembered that I had helped her share her personal folder a few months before so that another employee and the receptionist could have access to them. Problem solved! The person she was logged in as had access to the share, so I reminded her of this. She then proceeded to tell me that she couldn't connect to her computer herself over the network that I would

have to do it, because since the receptionist called in sick, she never even turned the PC on in the morning! -**Marc K.**, MCP, IS Director

Just a little adjustment needed

As a former support person for a law firm, I have many, many stories regarding lawyers and technology. However, one in particular stands out. When the firm moved from a DOS-based to a Windows-based environment, this particular lawyer "didn't have time" to attend the training we provided. The day we switched to Windows, he called me into his office because he couldn't get the mouse to move appropriately and the buttons didn't work properly. After he showed me what he was attempting to do, I quickly turned the mouse around and explained that it might work better right-side-up. -**Kelly B.**, MCP, CAN, Technical Training Consultant

I'm hanging up now

I was working at a major online service at the time. I was talking to a woman who was using a Macintosh with our software and she was not on our latest software build. I noticed in the call log that the previous tech instructed her to download the latest software and install it and then she would be okay. So I asked her, "Did you go out and download the software and install it already?" She responded, "Oh no, I haven't gone anywhere, I've been home the whole day." I clarified, "Okay, but did you download the latest software from our Web site?" She said, "Didn't that guy I talked to last time do that for me?" I asked, "Did he download the software for you to your computer? Is that what you are saying occurred?"—which we neither had the ability or desire to do, so I knew this was not the case. She said, "Well sure. He described it as he was doing it." I said, "Ma'am, he was giving you directions so that YOU could do it. I'll go ahead and put those directions in an e-mail for you. You just go online and check your e-mail and follow the directions okay?" She said, "Okay, but I have to hang up to use the phone line to get online." I said, "Yes ma'am, you sure do." Thank God for single-line households. -**Paige L.**

Creative installation plans

I had a user who wanted me to install some printer drivers for her manager. At this time her manager was traveling and had taken his laptop with him. She took me into his office and said: "Can you install the printer drivers for his new printer?" I said: "OK, but I could not install the drivers, until he returns with his laptop" Well she said: "Can't you install the drivers in the terminal (referring to his monitor)" I said: "How would you like me to install the drivers?" So she went over to the monitor and turned it on. We both stood there looking at the monitor for a couple of seconds. Then she realized that nothing was happening and turned off the monitor, and said: "I guess we will have to wait until he comes back with his laptop" I could not believe this user (who has a computer of her own at her desk) was so blind to the fact that you need a computer to install printer drivers. -**Jason**

Is there an antidote?

I had a user a few years ago ask me if he needed to go to the doctor to get a shot to protect himself from the computer virus going around. It was all I could do to not burst out laughing while explaining computer viruses. -**Randy S.**, Sr. Programmer/Analyst

All I did was...

I worked at a manufacturer of network management software a few years ago, and we had a client (alleged network admin) who used LAN Manager 2. He called us one day in high dudgeon because our blessed software had stopped blinking working (I paraphrase slightly). On questioning him further, I ascertained that it was recent, and that our (OS/2 1.3/LAN Manager-based) services did not now run. "No, nothing's flaming changed..." quoth he "...all I've done is apply an upgrade." "What upgrade?" I asked innocently. "All I chuffing did was upgrade my chuffing PDC to NT, I followed all the chuffing

instructions...". I did my best to explain to him that different operating systems didn't necessarily run the same software, but he was fairly incoherent by then. Mentioning that he could contact our sales department about purchasing an upgrade was possibly less than politic. -**Anonymous**

I'm not that dumb

I work for a public relations firm. We had a user very recently call me and complain about how slow the laptop we'd given her was. It was actually my old laptop, so I knew the thing was actually pretty speedy and I wanted to find out why it was slow for her. She complained that she'd been at a client site giving a PowerPoint presentation and the slide transitions crawled, sometimes taking 10-30 seconds to bring up a slide. I thought to myself "Sheesh, she ran it off a floppy, and that's why it's slow." I asked if this were the case and she acted indignant and said "No, I'm not that dumb, I ran it off the network." I asked her how she'd run it off our network if she was at the client's site. It turns out she'd dialed up a RAS connection and been running her 10Mb presentation across a phone line. -**Anonymous**

System crash

A customer wanted to know why their system kept crashing every time they were running AutoCAD 12 or 13. We looked at their system setup and you would not believe what they had. 486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 540MB Hard Drive I think the drive was compressed, Windows 95. Hopefully I can remember the other ones to send also. -**Jennifer**

Need an acre or so

A couple of years ago I worked with a woman who complained that her mouse pad wasn't big enough. We used optical mice so if the mouse went off the pad, the pointer stopped moving. She would slide her mouse over to the end of the pad and the pointer was still in the middle of the screen so, obviously, the mouse pad wasn't large enough. It never occurred to her to pick the mouse up and reposition it. -**Tim P.**, Software Engineer.

Intermittent problem

After one of my techs completed some installs on one of our more 'challenged' end looser user I received a call from her. Apparently whenever she hits her spacebar; one of the phones in the next cubicle rings, but not all the time. She wanted to know when we could fix this 'intermittent ' problem? -**Doug Greenfield**, Performance Engineer

Not-so-mass destruction

A guy from my office brings in his computer and asks me if I can rebuild it for him, reloading Windows and all of his applications. He claimed that all of his programs were corrupt, none of them worked right, and a virus must have destroyed everything. The solution was a bit simpler than he expected. His hard drive was full. I removed a couple of programs that he no longer used and everything then worked great. -**Stan Durbin**, Technical Trainer

No sugar added

One story still sticks with me. A supervisor in the accounting division called me and reported that one of her clerks had spilled a soda in the keyboard and it would not function properly. I told her that the keyboard uses electricity and that the liquid probably was causing a problem. Her response: "But it was a diet soda!" -**C.E.**

"ID Ten T"

I had recently set up a docking station for a user. They were expecting problems and sure enough a few minutes after leaving, she called me to report their keyboard was locked up. Nothing she typed was being entered. A quick visit to her office showed the problem. She was trying to reply to an e-mail but nothing

she type showed up. She had not actually hit return yet. Because she was only viewing the e-mail, naturally she couldn't edit it. Just another error code with the ID Ten T (ID10T)... **-Bob F.**

Make it go away

I would like to nominate my Ex Sister-in Law for the dumbest user award. After building and setting her up with a new system, she called me to ask about the computer going on idle. I told her that, yes, her system could and would go on idle. After discussing this with her to explain everything properly, she called back to ask how to shut down the monitor, while the computer was on idle. Which of course I responded: by simply turning it off. I found this to be a very funny question. Thought you would too! **-Teresa H.**

How do you drive this thing?

I have a great one for you. About 4 months ago I was installing new computers in a securities firm on Wall Street. I brought the computer in to a broker, set it up and left. The next day he requested I come to his office. He lifts his mouse and asks, "What the hell is this?" I reply, "That's your mouse." He responds to me, "What the hell do I need this for?" **-John C.**

Kissing cousins

The story I have to tell isn't really about a dumb user, though I can't help but think of him whenever the topic comes up. The scene: I'm a tech for an ISP, and taking new account configuration calls. This fellow calls in with problems. He can't understand the instructions on the CD sleeve for how to install the software, get online, and start chatting. Okay—we have this all the time. So much so, that we have a step by step walk through, complete with screenshots of every step as a guide. I pull it up just to make sure I can be as explicit as possible with this gentleman who seems to be having so many problems. I spent nearly an hour and a half with him on the phone getting him configured and connected. He required three or four repeats and additional explanations for every step of the process. He was very earnest, and tried very hard, and I could tell he felt sorry for his inability to comprehend what I was trying to explain to him. When we finally got him configured and ready to go, he was very pleased. It was his parting shot that's stuck with me through the years. "I'm really sorry that took so long. You'll have to forgive me, my parents were related!" I barely managed to hang the headset up before losing control of the burst of laughter that erupted. To this day, I still chuckle whenever I think of that phone conversation. **-Tom S.,** Micro Computer Services, Desktop

Can I get a copy of that?

Remember the good old "486"-days when every CPU had a keylock switch? One of our customers called us, saying he was unable to start his computer, because he hasn't got a key to start the engine. Also, a customer called because he had a problem with a diskette he wanted to use. Our sales representative told him to send us a copy of this disk. After two minutes the fax machine printed out a copy of the diskette. We sent the fax back with the information that it is a double-sided disk, and we would need the other side also. (Not nice, but a good laugh for us) Sorry for my English. **-Michael W.**

Where does this cord go?

Our software company hired a new "remote" salesperson who called each of the admins in our department at least once a day for the first two weeks with a number of different complaints/problems. At one point she called complaining that her laptop battery wasn't holding the charge and something was wrong with the power supply. I had tested everything before sending it out to her, and another admin and I tried troubleshooting the problem over the phone with her. We ended up having her send everything back. We tested it and all worked fine. We returned the laptop to her and she was still having problems. My co-worker finally deduced that she was trying to connect the power supply through the CPU cooling vent which was located next to the power supply input. **-Anonymous**

Human error

The first happened earlier this year when a printer was delivered directly to a user, rather than the IS department. The user, taking the initiative, decided to install the printer himself. He did amazingly well for a non-computer person, and got everything connected correctly. Reading the manual, he discovered he had to now install the drivers, which were on CD. His computer was rather old, and unbeknownst to him did not come with a CD drive. It did, however, feature a 5 ¼" floppy drive which he had never used. In many car CD players, you simply push the CD into a slot, and the mechanism will "grab" it and pull it in. Thinking a PC CD drive was the same way, he stuck it into the 5 ¼" drive slot. About halfway in, it stuck, but with just a bit of a push he managed to get it all the way in. He finally called us when, in spite of flipping the drive lever down, the computer still wouldn't find the drivers. We never did get the CD out.

Another incident involved the Operations Manager for our company. A normally calm and intelligent person, he was frustrated by an error within Outlook. Whenever he would open mail, suddenly lines would start inserting at the beginning of the letter. The body of the message scrolled down off the screen so quickly, he couldn't read it. While it happened to him regularly, our tech support department was unable to duplicate the error, even on the user's computer. Finally we noticed that, when reading email, his forearm would lay across the keyboard, just clipping the "Enter" button on the number pad. -**Jim P.**, IS Support Center

Salesman didn't know jack

I just moved my daughter into her dorm at UC Santa Barbara and the dorm has just installed a new Ethernet network. I had installed the Ethernet card but I did not have the patch cord needed to connect to the network. I went to a couple of large electronics stores (Circuit City & Radio Shack) but they had run out because of the large demand from the school dorms. The third place I stopped at was Staples and when I ask if they had any Ethernet patch cords the sales person took me to where they were supposed to be located (after he had asked someone about the location) and there were none in the area. The Sales Person then proceeded to take me to another location and pulled a phone extension off the rack and told me that this would work just as well. I am a Technician at an IS shop and very familiar with networks and its equipment and I knew that this would not work. As I explained to him why this would not work I wondered how many he had sold to parents that did not have any technical training in this field. My guess is that there are a few unhappy parents out there that wondering why the cord will not fit in the jack. -**Bob R.**, Desktop Services

That's what you do...

Then there's the one about the "IT Professional" who bought a brand-new, fully configured system. It was delivered and set up by the technician who built it. Imagine the tech's surprise to receive an irate call from Mr. Professional that his system would not boot into Windows. After a grueling 60 minute telephone run-down, the tech went back (a 60-mile round-trip) to Mr. P's home. Imagine the tech's even greater surprise when he found that Mr. P had fdisked his hard drive. When asked why he did that to a pre-configured machine, he replied "It's brand-new and that's what you always do with brand-new computers." "Sigh" - **Nancy W.**

Floral life

All right, here's one for the record books: I had a user who consistently had problems with her monitor. I visited her PC multiple times, and each time she complained that the monitor was malfunctioning, and she wanted a new one. I replaced the monitor twice before getting suspicious. After the last call, I pretended to walk away, only to turn and see her stand up and water the plant she had just replaced back ON TOP OF THE MONITOR! She will be waiting a long time for a replacement now. -**Jonathan F.**, Network, MIS

Window pains

Panicking, one of my users came running into my office. "Something is really wrong with my machine. The Windows all look funny." I walked with the person back to their office and had them show me what they meant. "See, the Window fills the whole screen. It was never like that before. I can't work with it like that." After explaining how to resize Windows with the Maximize, Minimize, Restore buttons, and making the person walk through the steps so to be able to do it in the future, we still had to go through how to get the screen exactly the right size so that the user could "work normally." It was amazing how the Window had to be a certain size for the person to think they could use it. Showing them that they could still work in any size Window did not matter. It took about 30 minutes to fix the problem to their satisfaction. Well, two days later, the user comes back into my office. "You know that problem I had where my computer looked all funny? Well, it happened again!! Can you fix it?" -**Anonymous**

Is that a fedora?

I was handling support calls for a fairly complex financial package. The end-user assured me she knew her way around the PC and that she could handle most problems on her own. As we began to work through the system, I asked her, "What do you see on your screen?" I suggested she get some remedial help, when she answered "Oh, I've got a "C" with a funny little sideways hat." -**Ron E.**

Spaced out

Here's a dumb user story for you. I was working in a help desk environment and working with a user over the phone. I was trying to get her to type the following command "assign c: d: ." I told her to type exactly what I said, which was "assign space c: space d:" and every time she typed in the command she said it came back with bad command or file name, so after a couple of times I asked her to tell me what she was typing letter by letter, to which she responded with the following "assign space c: space d: " As you can see, she was typing the word *space* instead of using the space bar. -**Gary Y.**, NT System Engineer

Disk errors

Three users come to mind, all involving floppy disks.

1. While working for the Education department I had a phone call from a user who needed a document off a disk, but was having problems with the document on the disk. I asked her to send me a copy of the disk so I could have a look and retrieve the document. 5 minutes later I had a copy of the disk, from the fax machine. She had copied the disk on the photocopier and faxed it to me.

2. A school principal rang and told me he had problems with a floppy disk which had very important information on it, and no, he had not made a backup. I went to the school and asked for the disk, which was given to me in three pieces. His cat had been playing with it and pulled it apart!

3. A school was having problems with all disk drives, but only when using disks the school had created. I went and had a look. No problems, it read every disk I put into it and created. It was then I saw the problem. A teacher came in with a disk with student work on it and asked for it to be labeled. The office girl took the disk, put a disk label on to it and inserted it into the typewriter to type the name on to the disk. I thought the disks looked a bit bent! -**Tim Sayre**

Back to basics

We have a user here at our office who was using his daughter's name as the main part of his password and has a number on the end of it. Each month he just adds one to the number and he has a new password. Even though this seems like a relatively easy thing to do when prompted by the network to change his password, he always has a problem and locks up his system. The technician or admin usually

has to help him change his password. One month he forgot how to spell his daughter's name—her name is Catherine and he kept spelling it with a K! —**Mamie A.**

One small adjustment

I work in a government agency, but I won't quote who or where (to protect the users), in an IT Branch, and we'll get inundated by users requesting assistance. This particular day, I received a call from a manager proclaiming her disk drive was malfunctioning because she couldn't insert the diskette. Making sure she wasn't trying to insert a 3.5" into a 5.25" drive and vice versa (yeah, we get those too), I told her I'd stop by after completing another run. Later that day, I walked into the facility and asked for the manager who proclaimed, "Thank God you're here." She escorted me to the machine in question and demonstrated her plight..."See it won't go in." I stood there for about 15 seconds examining the disk drive, then flipped the diskette over and it promptly went in (it was one of those boxes that had the user pop in the diskette on the side). I quickly walked out of the facility and busted out laughing. —**Ralph**

Big splash

We recently took the browser service and network neighborhood icons away from our users, as many of them were venturing into the world of "browsing" our servers, causing many potential security threats. As a result, they lost their mapped drives to their personal folders on their local file servers. We emailed everyone the instructions for the "net use persistent" command to restore those links, but there were a few who didn't quite "get it". One of these called and insisted that he had followed our instructions to the letter, but still could not map the drive. Over and over I asked him to repeat to me what he had heard from me: "net use x: /persistent:yes \\server\file". He repeated it word for word, but still insisted that it would not work. I finally dialed in to his PC with our remote software to see what he had typed. This is what was on the command line: "net use x: forwardslashpersistent:yes lserver\file." Genius, sheer genius. —**Bill A.**

Head of the class

I used to work for a 2-year branch college of a 4-year school as the Senior Information Systems Technician. I received a call one day from one of the Math Professors and she said that her printer would not work. I asked her if she had turned it on and received a barrage of indignant responses stating that she had a Ph.D. in mathematics and she knew enough to turn her "damn" printer on. I went upstairs to the Doctor's office and looked at her printer with her standing there next to me. I turned the printer on and watched as a bunch of files started printing out. I was quickly informed that if I told anyone about this incident I would fail Calculus IV. (I passed the class with an "A" and promptly told the entire school after I finished the semester). —**Bobby C.**

Another under-cover disk error

This happened to me some time ago while I was working for the Support Department of an accounting software company. At the time I was doing telephone support. We had just sent out an update to the software, with instructions to call the help desk if anyone had problems installing. I received a call from this guy saying that the disk didn't fit into his floppy disk drive. After quite a bit of messing around, I finally worked out that he actually had a 5 1/2" disk, instead of the 3 1/2" I was expecting... No problem, I also got him to measure his disk drive, and we worked out that this was also 5 1/4" (a rare case of sending the correct sized disk to the customer). After telling the guy to turn the disk around, and upside down, and everything else I could think of, I started to wonder how stupid this user really was, or if I was missing something....So I asked if he had removed the disk from its cover (you know, the paper slips the 5 1/4" disk come in). He replied that he hadn't realized that he had to take it out of its cover, but that's not the end of the story....After coming back to the phone a few minutes later, he said that although the disk now fitted into the disk drive, he couldn't get the software to run. At this stage, I arranged a site visit to go out and help the poor bloke. When I turned up onsite, it turned out that when he had taken it "out of its cover", he had taken a knife and opened up the disk, taking out the actual floppy inside, then jammed this into the drive. The reason it hadn't fitted in the first place was that there was another disk still in the drive....Soon

after this the client changed brands of software, and started using another company for support....We were so sorry to see him go... **-Andrew W.**

Green with envy?

My husband and I own a small computer sales/service business. I got a call one day from a customer who had recently purchased a computer system, complete with printer. She was complaining that her new printer would not print in color. I went through the normal procedure for troubleshooting printer problems, but still she got no color. The document she was printing was a Microsoft Word document and she was trying to print it green. Finally, I asked if she had set her font color to green, and her response was, "What is font color?" Problem solved!! **-Kerry L.**

It ain't heavy, it's a program

Here's one that tops all the stories I have ever encountered or heard....One of the advancement planning committees in the area had actually gotten to the point where it had a huge staff and a growing technology problem. They finally hired someone to be on point for tech questions. He was very...creative ...in his solutions to problems. One day, he was talking to the receptionist downstairs and she mentioned that she wanted a monitor stand to let the monitor go above her desk surface, since she was running out of room to do her work. Very seriously, he advised against getting one because they did not work after a while. She asked him why they stopped working and he replied, "Well, every time you add a program onto your computer, it puts an icon on the desktop and adds an entry to the start menu. After awhile, too much gets on there and the monitor becomes heavier and heavier, and the stand can't support the weight. The whole thing can crash down, just because you put a few more programs on." He recently left the position because he said nobody took his advice seriously enough. Wonder why.... **-Elisabeth McM.**

Lawyer was in the dark

The lawyer's secretary calls me and she is all in a fluster. Her monitor is not working. Attempts to talk her through the routine steps, "Is it plugged in?", "Is the power switch on?" etc., were met with a screeching "fix it now!" I requested she put her boss on, the lawyer gets on the phone, and I attempt to begin the problem identification process again. The lawyer is almost as bad as the secretary. After a few minutes of futile attempts to calm them down, I informed the lawyer that I would come to the office to address the problem. I told him that if the problem was a hardware failure there would be no charge but if the problem was not a hardware failure then they would be billed a service call minimum, \$72.00 plus taxes. He agreed to these terms. I drove to their office and identified the problem within 1 minute. Someone had turned the brightness on the monitor down to the minimum setting. At least they paid the bill I presented without argument. **-Mark D.**, Operations Manager

What are you running here?

I have two. A lady called the shop I work at and asked to speak with a technician. I answered the phone and asked her how I could help her. She said she had printer problems. After asking several questions and I was not getting anywhere I asked her what program she was running when she had the printer problem. There was long silence and great disgust in her voice when she finally said, "I am not running a program I am running a computer." At that I was lost as what to say.

Second story: I was working on a computer one day when a young man came into the shop and was asking me if the owner needed any more help. He stated he knew everything there was to know about computers and was looking for a job. I told him he would have to talk with the boss about that. As we continued to talk I discovered the computer I was working on was his and he had Windows totally corrupt. I never let him know I was working on his computer but it was hard to keep a straight face. The cover to his computer was under the bench so he did not realize that it was his computer I was working on. I hope you get a chuckle out of these. **-Wesley R.**

The chicken or the egg?

Here's the one that won our Ticket of the Year at our site's Ticket of the Week Sweepstakes. Other than the problem in the trouble ticket, there was another problem: we of the tech support staff didn't know whether to give the award to the user or to the help desk for not resolving the issue and went ahead and opened the ticket. The ticket read, and I quote, "User cannot read files in Microsoft Word after they have been deleted." –**Bill S.**

Couldn't you just wave?

While I was working at a customer's site one day, the system manager walked into the computer room, sat down in front of the console terminal, looked straight into the terminal, and very loudly said "HELLO" to his console. He then proceeded to log in to the system. I had to stop what I was doing to see what he was saying hello to. Digital Equipment Corp had an operating system called RSTS-11 which typed "SAY HELLO" on your terminal screen when you attempted to log in to the system. You were then supposed to respond with your account and password. This system manager (who had a Ph.D.) responded to the login message by verbally saying "Hello". I asked him why he was shouting hello to the terminal. His response was that he had to shout hello so the computer could hear him over the computer system's noise. If he did not say it loud enough, the system would not let him log on. Needless to say, I had to leave the room before I busted out laughing. –**John D.**

Do disks gain weight?

I had a user say that she has a 3.5" floppy disk that she had been using for several months and now it no longer fits in the drive. When I visited her PC, sure enough, her floppy disk was half way inserted and she could not push it in any further. I removed the floppy and tried it myself, and it would only go in half way. Upon examining the floppy, I saw that she had applied a new label. The label was the long version that wraps over the top of the floppy, but she applied it only to the front of the disk, thus trapping the metal sliding door under the new label. –**Dave U.**

Missing equipment

Okay, while performing the duties (punishment?) of the help desk I received this call: Ringing Phone.

Me: Help Desk! How can I assist you today?

Caller: Well my scanner isn't working.

Me: I see. Is the power turned on?

Can you see a green light next to the power button?

Caller: Yes!

Me: Is the cable connected from the scanner to the back of the computer?

Caller: Yes!

Me: Does your computer report any errors when you attempt to scan a document?

Caller: No! It just doesn't scan this report in. I need this done in two hours and I can't get this thing to work.

Me: I'll send a technician out. Ringing phone after technician dispatched.

Me: Help Desk! How can I assist you today?

Technician: (holding back laughter) This ticket on the scanner is closed. I'll put my comments on the repair ticket.

Technician returns Laughing and having a great time.

Me: What's up with the scanner?

Technician: Read the ticket.

I pull up the ticket and read: No scanner. User needs a brain transplant. User attempted to scan a document into the monitor by holding it up to the screen and stepping on the mouse. By the way, the mouse needs to be replaced as the user crushed it. Now that's dumb! –**Neal R.**

Shift in thinking necessary

I work for a computer repair company. One day I got a call from a woman who wanted to know how to delete files in Windows 95. I got her into Windows Explorer and then asked which files she wanted to delete. She responded with "All of them". I explained to her that she did not want to delete all of her files because this would make her computer inoperable and found out that she was trying to delete files because the new version of AOL would not install until she had enough free space on her hard drive. I asked her to read the directories that were on her computer and found out that they were aol30a, aol30b, aol30c, etc. I decided that it would be safe to remove some of the old AOL directories so I told her to highlight the folders, hold down the Shift key and then press Delete. I heard a repeated beep and asked her which key she was holding down. "The long one at the bottom." "Ma'am," I replied, "that is the space bar. The shift key is the one with the word "Shift" written on it. -**Christian H.**, Support Specialist

Oblivious developer

I belong to a mailing list for developers using a certain product. The list moderator is an author who has written a book on learning how to develop with this product. In her signature line she lists the title and publisher of her book. Recently a subscriber to the list posted a note to the group asking her for the title of the book. DUH! -**Scott D.**

But the light goes off!

This is close to one which I read on your site. A user called to complain that her virus scan didn't work first thing in the morning like everyone else's in her department did. I asked her what happened when she booted her computer in the morning. She said that nothing happened. While she was away at lunch, I rebooted her PC and the virus scan automatically scanned her PC. Next day she called to complain that I still hadn't fixed it. I immediately went to her desk, and asked her to show me what it does. She turned her monitor off, then back on and said "See!". Apparently she was just turning off her monitor at night and she thought turning it on, rebooted her PC. -**Fred R.**

One liner

Here in Tennessee when you mention "megabytes" they think you mean a good day at fishing. -**Thad**

Color blind

I was called to assist the MD's PA who was complaining bitterly about how bad her PC was (again); this time she was complaining that whenever she tried to type anything, nothing happened. This really threw me as it only seemed to happen in Microsoft Word. After a little bit of investigation, and multiple denials of culpability, it turned out that she had set the colors to white text on a white background. -**John H.**

That's not nice!

We recently migrated to Lotus Notes, which displays the 'folder' name the user is in at the top of the screen, along with the user's name. One poor soul called the Help Desk with the following: "It says, Jane Q. Doe - Trash on my mail screen. I AM *NOT* TRASH!" Enjoy :-)-**Nancy A.**

Hide and go seek

I had a user call about a problem printing a letter using Word 97. After a certain point beginning with an "h", all the words had dots (.....) under them and did not print. She swore that it was something wrong with her computer. I tried to tell her that she had somehow hit [Shift]+[Control]+H at the same time which is the shortcut to hide text. The next day she called with the same problem, again insisting it was a problem with the computer. When I told her once again how to remove the hidden text option, she said she would write it down so it wouldn't happen again. I'm sure it is still happening and she still thinks it is her computer.

Thanks for the laughs. -**Melinda J.**