

The Old New Thing

Blow the dust out of the connector

3 Mar 2004 7:00 AM

42

Okay, I'm about to reveal one of the tricks of Product Support.

Sometimes you're on the phone with somebody and you suspect that the problem is something as simple as forgetting to plug it in, or that the cable was plugged into the wrong port. This is easy to do with those PS/2 connectors that fit both a keyboard and a mouse plug, or with network cables that can fit both into the upstream and downstream ports on a router.

Here's the trick: Don't ask "Are you sure it's plugged in correctly?"

If you do this, they will get all insulted and say indignantly, "Of course it is! Do I look like an idiot?" without actually checking.

Instead, say "Okay, sometimes the connection gets a little dusty and the connection gets weak. Could you unplug the connector, blow into it to get the dust out, then plug it back in?"

They will then crawl under the desk, find that they forgot to plug it in (or plugged it into the wrong port), blow out the dust, plug it in, and reply, "Um, yeah, that fixed it, thanks."

(Or if the problem was that it was plugged into the wrong port, then the act of unplugging it and blowing into the connector **takes their eyes off the port**. Then when they go to plug it in, they will look carefully and get it right the second time because they're paying attention.)

Customer saves face, you close a support case, everybody wins.

Corollary: Instead of asking "Are you sure it's turned on?", ask them to turn it off and back on.

Blog - Comment List MSDN TechNet

Comments



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3 Mar 2004 7:21 AM

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Social engineering skillz make for a better support experience. :-)

**Tim Smith**

3 Mar 2004 7:22 AM

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BWAHAHAHA

The evil things we do in tech support to get the problem solved.

**Clayton Nash**



3 Mar 2004 7:25 AM

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I had a similar experience with someone who refused to check their DNS settings despite the fact that it was obvious that they had not typed one in. I eventually resorted to "Could you check if you added a space after the settings" to get them to look there when lo and behold, the DNS setting was blank.



quanta

3 Mar 2004 7:27 AM

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Blowing dust out of the connector was the premier method of fixing all your Nintendo and SNES cartridge problems. :)



Mike Dunn

3 Mar 2004 7:47 AM

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There was also the "clean the cart's edge connector with a pencil eraser" trick.

Although nothing compares to the "turn the console upside down to make it work" trick you had to do with early PlayStations. ;)



Terry Denham

3 Mar 2004 8:13 AM

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When I was in SQL Server support I can't count the times that I used this technique to get the customer to do something that I suspected might be overlooked without offending the customer's sensibilities.

I worked one issue where the customer stated without a doubt that it wasn't a particular problem (didn't actually check) but had been having the problem for months. This clued me into the fact that if someone has been having a problem for months and refuses to consider one possibility then in all likelihood the problem will be in the area they refuse to look into. This comes under the idea of stepping outside your box (assumptions).



James Curran

3 Mar 2004 8:29 AM

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I did a very similar trick for an embedded system. Among the requirements were that if the printer was off-line, the output would not be sent to the printer so I (as developer), had to read the pins and do some non-standard stuff. The terminal would "do the right thing" if the printer was turned on, turned off, unplugged, off-line etc. There was only one condition that would cause trouble: if the cable was loose (it would be reading the "power-on", but not "Ready" signals). The symptoms made it obvious to me (our user base was small enough that tech support calls went to the developer) what the problem was, but the users would refuse to believe me when I told them the cable was loose (It was right in front of them, so they would just glance at it and assure me it was connected).

Eventually, I came up with the idea of tell them "To isolate the problem, could you

temporarily unplug the printer". Since it would always "do the right thing", suddenly it would start working again. Before they got over their amazement, I'd say "OK, you can plug the printer in again and call me if you have any more trouble..."



Mario Goebbels

3 Mar 2004 8:52 AM

#

In an old company I had to do techsupport each time the support staff was low on people (due illness or whatever). I always tried to be friendly and avoid to offend the people, until these happened in a row one a day:

- A supposed electrotechnician was complaining the hell outta me because of folds in an IDE cable, supposedly impairing the electrical signal flow a lot (genius, they get delivered like this... ALL over the world, and you're the only one to complain).
- Some moron was flaming me because I suggested that his SCSI termination problems are highly likely related to his bus in T-form (not allowed) where one end was not terminated (genius x2)
- Someone flamed me because we sell graphics cards without serials, rendering him unable to install the graphics driver! (he never said to me what he tried to install, but when I gave him a PDVD serial, he suddenly calmed down).
- A boss of an enduser PC support shop complaining me a tinnitus because we supposedly shipped broken CPUs with the mainboard (he ordered Tualatin P3s and a Coppermine mainboard. Genius!)

I'm sorry, that day I learned to treat customers accordingly on THEIR mood and THEIR stupidity.



Matt Bishop

3 Mar 2004 9:55 AM

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The only problem is that you don't then know what the actual problem is - do I need to go and give my employees eye tests or do I need to ask the cleaning staff to find another vocation?



Bruce

3 Mar 2004 9:56 AM

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In the mid-80s we did the same sort of thing for PSS for communications software & external modems.

You can't ask them to make sure the modem is turned on, so you ask them to turn it off and back on. Half the time, at least, you would hear them fiddle around because (a) it wasn't actually turned on or (b) it wouldn't turn on because it was unplugged.



Gene Hamilton

3 Mar 2004 9:57 AM

#

I had someone call me and say that their modem was not working. I quickly determined that the modem was not getting the dialtone. No problem I thought, (this is where I

make my mistake) I asked the person to make sure the telephone line was plugged into the computer. He checked and came back and said, "yes". For 20 mins I had him unplug the phonewire from the computer and plug it into a regular telephone to confirm that the line was working. I asked him make sure that he had the wire in the right jack on the back of the computer. He asked "Which one?" "There are 3 of them." I realized that he had been plugging the phonewire into the ethernet port.



余啊雷

3 Mar 2004 11:05 AM

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Raymond Chen offers a useful trick for people offering telephone technical support....



余啊雷

3 Mar 2004 12:12 PM

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TechGrrl

3 Mar 2004 12:54 PM

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Also, when working in Tech support more than once we ask the customer to REVERSE the ethernet cable. That way we make sure both sides are connected. :)



Norman Diamond

3 Mar 2004 5:01 PM

#

Part 1. Yesterday when my mouse didn't work immediately after powering up and booting, I tried to push the connector but it wouldn't move, it was already all the way in. So I did unplug it and plug it back in, and it started working. (Yes this wasn't the right way to do it, since PS/2 devices are supposed to require plugging in while the power is off, but it was quicker to try it anyway.)

Part 2. Today when my mouse didn't work immediately after powering up and booting, I became more suspicious. As one experiment, I tried doing a right click and then a left click. The mouse started working.

So is this a hardware bug or has a famous Windows 95 bug reappeared in Windows XP?

But anyway, sometimes doing an unplug and a replug is actually accurate.



Vincent Sturzenberger

3 Mar 2004 8:29 PM

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Raymond, if you know about this, can you explain how web page icons are supposed to work inside IE? For example, sometimes when I visit <http://www.news.com>, the icon to the left of the URL in the address bar becomes a red circle with a C in the middle (for CNet). But, most of the time, it just stays the icon of the page with the blue E.

Likewise with bookmarks: when I bookmark a site, and look at it in the favorites menu,

the icon is usually the page with the blue E, but, sometimes the icon next to the bookmark is something related to the page (E.g. red circle with C in it.)
The problem is, these icons seem to change without me doing anything, and most of the time they are the blue E, and a little bit of the time they are something different.
How do you get an icon for your web page? Why isn't it always displayed?



余啊雷

3 Mar 2004 8:50 PM

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This is an absolutely brilliant technique for those providing tech support over the phone.
See also: Phil Agre's excellent How to Help Someone Use a Computer:
<http://polaris.gseis.ucla.edu/pagre/how-to-help.html>



Spyder

3 Mar 2004 9:17 PM

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to get that web icon, upload an icon to the root of your web server with the name "favicon.ico".



余啊雷

3 Mar 2004 9:23 PM

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Shane King

3 Mar 2004 11:45 PM

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However, support in IE is incredibly buggy, hence the behaviour you describe where sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Damned if I can find rhyme or reason to how IE decides when it should work. :/

It's rather ironic that every modern browser except IE gets it right, considering IE invented the feature!



hulver

4 Mar 2004 1:24 AM

#

I always thought the icon disappeared from the favourites menu when it was flushed from the disk cache.

It happens to me in Mozilla/Firebird/FireFox/Blah de blah as well.



Simon Cooke [exMSFT]

4 Mar 2004 9:07 AM

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It's a shame that under NTFS it doesn't get stored in a separate stream as part of the favorite URL shortcut itself. Then it wouldn't need to be cached separately.

Of course, that'd pretty much require everyone to use NTFS, which is a shame.

I keep waiting for more and more NTFS usage by MS apps. Seems a pity to have all of these wonderful ways of storing data and attributes, but not to use them for backward compatibility's sake.



Raymond Chen

4 Mar 2004 9:23 AM

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Of course we'd first have to stop people from using floppy disks and CDs and anything else that isn't NTFS. If you copy a file to a floppy or CD or store it on a Novell network, you lose the NTFS streams. Imagine the uproar if shortcuts didn't work if you stored them on a Novell server!



Simon Cooke [exMSFT]

4 Mar 2004 2:01 PM

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True, that would cause problems - although Yet Another FAT Kludge could be performed to extract the data (bleuch). I just hate to see an elegant solution that's already there, tested and debugged not being used.

Another alternative would be to store the icon in the URL shortcut file itself at the end - but that might cause backwards compatibility problems.

New shortcut file type?

It doesn't really matter anyway, to be honest :)



余啊雷

5 Mar 2004 12:11 AM

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余啊雷

5 Mar 2004 1:35 PM

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余啊雷

5 Mar 2004 1:36 PM

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Matt [MSFT]

6 Mar 2004 2:24 PM

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Nice to see PSS included in the war stories! :)

I remember one of the PSS guys here had a customer that wouldn't follow instructions a few years ago. She insisted the problem was X when the support tech thought the problem was Y. The customer wouldn't do any Y troubleshooting.

Finally he asked her to start the EDLIN debugger and type a few commands to get some hex output. He asked her to read off a few certain bytes from the hex output. (Which was, of course, meaningless.)

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "I know exactly what the problem is now! Let's go to Y and...."

I've also had customers that have screwed things up but for political reasons (such as the boss in the room) couldn't admit they screwed up. I've found that once I give the customer an "out" by allowing them to blame Microsoft for their problem ("yes, you're right... we should redesign that interface, it is confusing") they're able to work with me to solve the problem.

**Ed**

7 Mar 2004 1:54 AM

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NTFS is a shame?



余啊雷

7 Mar 2004 4:19 AM

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Malcolm suggests that bug hunters should adopt some of the same face saving techniques that product support people use....

**Alex Feinman**

8 Mar 2004 11:17 AM

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Are you sure you didn't mean debug.exe? Edlin was a text editor.

**Matt**

8 Mar 2004 3:47 PM

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See? If I didn't know what I was talking about, then the customer probably didn't either, and that was the whole point... to get the customer so far out of her comfort zone that she was dependent upon the tech.

**Peter Evans**

11 Mar 2004 10:33 PM

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Gotta luv' that EDLIN debugger :> comment.

Blow the dust of the connector holds nothing over on that!



余啊雷

11 Dec 2004 10:44 PM

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余啊雷

20 Feb 2007 5:22 AM

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The Old New Thing : Blow the dust out of the connector "人際工程", 其實就只是一些講話的小技巧, 怎麼讓你說話的對象可以很輕易地作到你請他做的事情, 同時又不會把氣氛弄得很僵或是變成互相對立的狀態。...



余啊雷

20 Feb 2007 8:46 AM

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PingBack from <http://rambleon.org/2007/02/20/solutions-worse-than-the-problem/>



余啊雷

21 Feb 2007 12:23 PM

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PingBack from <http://mousenetwork.org/wire/?p=158>



余啊雷

27 Feb 2007 12:10 PM

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PingBack from <http://www.helioscope.co.uk/index.php/2007/02/27/19/>



余啊雷

25 Mar 2007 5:16 AM

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Yesterday, I remembered an old blog entry that helps to emphasise the importance of communication in



余啊雷

10 Apr 2007 4:31 PM

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It was getting late as I posted on the first set of articles which I cleared out of my README file last



余啊雷

31 Jan 2008 11:18 AM

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PingBack from <http://www.evanlin.com/wp/?p=814>



余啊雷

18 May 2008 9:03 AM

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PingBack from <http://customerrelay.com/2008/05/18/tell-customers-tactfully-their-mistakes/>