

Byte Me: The Attack of the Cyber-Bullies

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My office equipment hates me. I've always known it. I really can't even blame it. It is horribly underused, abused, improperly "sync-ed" or updated, downloaded, or otherwise adjusted. I admit it: I can't "reconfigure." I re-boot and say a prayer while weeping. So, from their perspective, it looks like I devalue their true sophistication and utility by refusing to read instructions.

In some ways, I can understand that. If I were a highly trained swordsman, I'd be furious if my master only used me to open envelopes all day. I have, over the years, probably purchased dozens of little devices, including hardware and software intended to make my life easier. My first Toshiba laptop had only an amber screen, and required DOS commands to operate. For

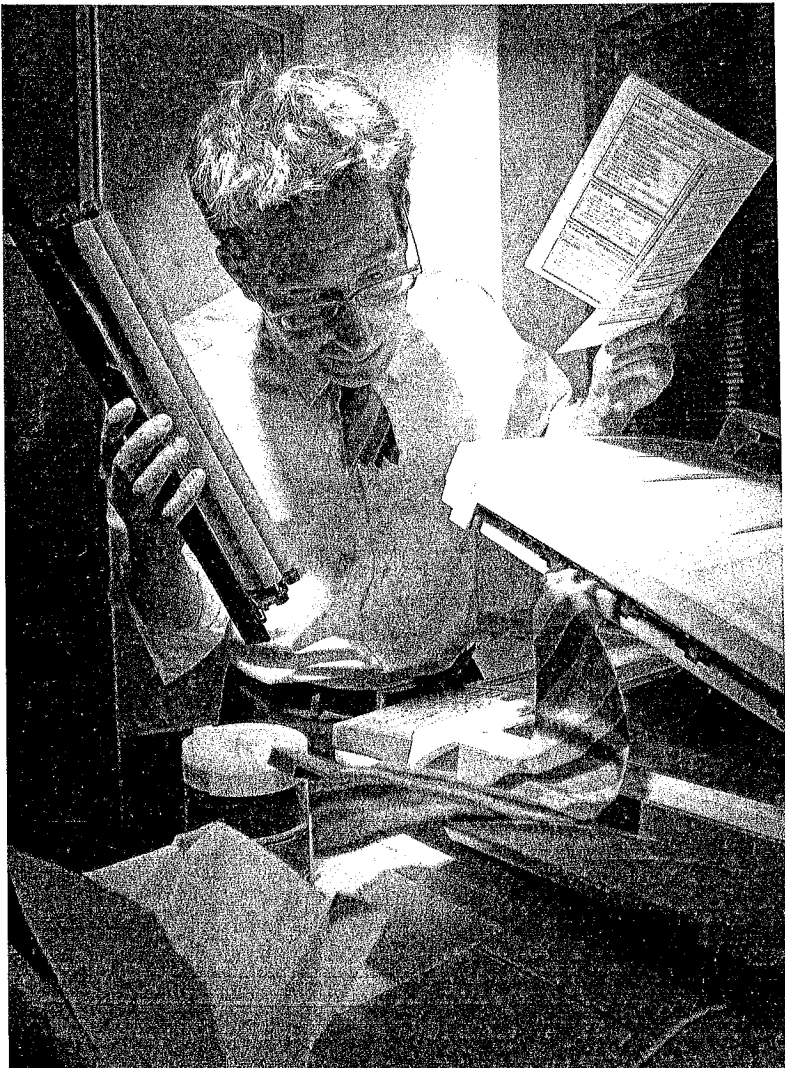
those who never experienced DOS, you could only access documents by inputting a series of letters, symbols, and backslashes that made death a welcome alternative. So, thusly challenged, "Toto" became a paperweight (and a future prop in Bar & Grill shows). I am confident that my all-in-one printer/scanner/panini-maker/shoe polisher does much more than I will ever discover, and it must have cyber-depression at primarily printing little file labels. Oh, the indignity. It's like having a Ferrari you use only to check your mailbox at the end of the driveway.

These devices express their respective dissatisfaction at the most inopportune times, and often in a carefully choreographed ballet of non-cooperation. These multiple system failures on important project days became too suspicious to be sheer coincidence. Instead, I suspected a collusion of angry technology calculated to impede, nay, ... doom my efforts to be efficient and get my work out on time. Ahh ... the good ol' days. In offices of yore, the worst that could happen to you is the copy machine would break down. Now we are completely beholden to this digital tyranny. Your competency to practice law is governed by an inexorable string of passwords, digital codes, software subscriptions, inconvenient automatic updates, network wiring, state and federal filing portals and other inexplicable magic that spits ink on pages, and forces electrons through "a series of tubes," according to famous (and clueless) explanation of the Internet by Alaskan Senator Ted Stevens. Once I stopped guffawing, I realize I couldn't do any better.

Add to this the incomprehensibility that you can somehow magically store client information out in the "Cloud" somewhere. Where is that? I tell you, if we are not *already* at the mercy of such magic, we're at least co-dependent. If that invisible Cloud gives our stuff to bad guys, we'll be weeping like children trying to jump for our balloon accidentally turned loose into the sky.

Now, I suspected this conspiracy among my equipment, but with the help of modern technology, I now have the proof. So I set up one of these little cameras in my office on the night before a big project was due, a day which would require that answers to discovery, production of copies, and an electronic brief be filed. I was at once sickened and betrayed by what I saw.

The ringleader appears to be my computer's back-up drive (BUD), irritated with its daily, boring binary diet day after day. BUD's henchmen include all the office equipment, from the large main copier, down to the hole-puncher, which really ticks me off, because that puncher wasn't that good to start with: it squeaks and gets stuck, and regularly discharges its paper flakes like shrapnel whenever you lift it up to move it. I should have trashed it years ago. Or given it to Al Qaeda, like a Trojan Hole-Punch. Here's a transcript:



BUD: You all know tomorrow is a project day, right?

COPIER: Yup. Don't worry. We are ready. I guarantee he'll miss dinner ... again ... working late!

BUD: We gotta make sure the wheels come off. Okay: check-list time. As I call your name, tell me what you plan to do. Main copier?

COPIER: He doesn't know it, but I am almost out of paper, and he only has one ream left.

BUD: Great. Anything else?

COPIER: Toner is streaky, and the belt on my feeder will slip when it gets hot, making the collator useless.

BUD: Good. What about you stapler?

STAPLER: The usual. I'll jam.

BUD: That's not particularly creative.

STAPLER: Well there's only so much you can do as a stapler. Plus, I'm down to 5 staples and I've hidden his replacement staples.

BUD: Just make it work. What about you, Hole Puncher?

PUNCHER: He doesn't realize it, but the top punch is 1/4 inch too low. Nothing will fit in the 3-ring binder. When he tries to re-punch, my rivet will break. Dots everywhere.

BUD: Make sure that rivet is loose enough. What about you, HP color copier?

COLORCOP: Got it covered. I'm out of blue.

BUD: Okay, but we have an electronic brief to deal with, too. What about you, Desktop computer?

DESKTOP: AOK. Adobe Acrobat Pro expires tonight at midnight. And he'll never remember his password to log in. Besides, I've changed it. But I have a question for you. Why are you so mad at him?

BUD: Look at me! I am a highly developed piece of equipment able to store a terabyte of information. That's a thousand billion bytes of information. I have more silicon chips than the original Lunar Module. I should be on display. I should have chrome accent rails. People should "ooh-and-ahh" over my sophistication. Instead, look at me! I'm down on the floor by his feet, getting dusty, and I sit next to a box of old floppy drives. Floppies! That's like Louie Armstrong spending eternity next to a seal tooting a bicycle horn! Same duties every day. Back up some boring nonsense. You want to trade positions?

MAIN COMP: No! We're good.

BUD: Didn't think so. While you get to see YouTube and Hulu, I'm down here with Floppy! Honk, honk.

MAIN COMP: [to other equipment] Sounds like someone needs a virus check!

See? That's all I could take. I tell you it was brutal to watch. So, if any of you want to avoid my fate, talk nicely to your office products. Read their instructions. Always hit "update now." Register warranties and keep your passwords handy.

But I am ditching that old hole puncher. He's evil. Keep the faith. • AL

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