

Technology may be evolving at warp speed, but one thing about IT will never change: Techs love to swap stories about the deficiencies of their users. The dumber, the better. That's just the way it works. How else are you going to make it through the week if you don't get to shake your head in disbelief after hearing at least one tale of epic confusion, ignorance, or arrogance?

TechRepublic member **zlito** started a [discussion thread](#) a few years ago asking everyone to share their best user stories. Judging by the response, an incredible number of members seem to have encountered users who created mayhem with magnets, asked for help locating the "any" key, used the CD drive as a cup holder, or took the word "desktop" to mean furniture. Others showcased user thought processes so bizarre and convoluted, you couldn't track them with a GPS.

Because such stories are fairly timeless, I've pulled a handful of classics to revisit. But I hope you'll jump into the discussion here and start a new, more recent round of all-time-best user tales.

## 1 Icon by any other name

I had one user, the sweetest lady, who was not very computer literate. After she got her new computer, she said, "Where are my programs?" I told her that I had made shortcuts on her desktop to the programs she used. She said, "When I click on the icon, that's not the right program." When I asked her which program she was referring to, she said, "The third icon down." I asked her which program that was. "Oh, I don't know the name of it. I just know on my old computer, it was the third icon down program."

This one took a while.

-- nabess

## 2 Money's worth

**Client:** I don't understand why that accounting software cost so much. It's only been used once.

**Consultant:** What do you mean, it's only been used once? You use it every day.

**Client:** No, I don't. You used it once when you put the program on my computer and it's been sitting in the box ever since.

...Time to get my money up front...

-- BWestly

## 3 IRQ sale

One of the contractors in my office ordered a new computer through his company. Unfortunately, he ordered a NIC with an RJ45 connector and we were on a coax network at the time. This was back in the days of Win95. I informed him of the problem and said I had a spare NIC to give him if he would order the correct NIC to replace the one I provided.

He got on the phone with his company and complained about the NIC. This guy thinks he is a computer genius, but really just thinks that bigger, better, and more are always the solution. So he ordered everything he could think of in this computer. Not a single bay was open and most of the slots were filled. Needless to say he had an IRQ problem. His company gave him the number of the computer company and told him to call their sales department. I was happy to see him on the phone because then he wasn't bothering me while I set up his computer. I overheard him say to the sales department, "My land guy says I'm out of IRQs. Can I buy some more of those?"

-- ldbollert

## 4 Retention dissension

We currently have a great policy for keeping e-mail to a minimum. It's only kept 90 days, then it's deleted, so if you want to save it past the retention period, you have to put it into a file somehow. This has been in effect for several years, but amazingly, we had a couple of executives in the legal dept who built up 40,000 messages in their inboxes each, without having any deleted. I finally got the connection when the new "retention

policy" was published. The company lawyers who wrote it had a line in the document that excluded themselves from the policy and made sure they could keep everything forever!

-- msholtva

## 5 #####

One of our marketing managers complained that he couldn't make any sense of a telephone management spreadsheet I'd sent him because he couldn't see when the calls were made. I explained that each worksheet in the spreadsheet had a name and the name indicated the applicable month. Two minutes later, he arrived at my desk saying that he still couldn't make any sense of the spreadsheet because there were no dates in the worksheets. I opened my copy and showed him that the dates and times were in column A. He then tried to tell me that I had sent him the wrong file because his column A just had "stars" in it! Oh boy—was his face red when I showed him how to expand the column! Makes you think, huh?!

-- PhatKatz

## 6 Must have been the instructions

Back when floppy disks were the only portable medium (good old 5 1/4 and 3.5 inch disks hold not much more than a mere 360K), I was working as a field engineer for a third-party support firm. Remembering two calls always brings a smile to my face.

**Caller #1:** A guy rings up and says that he has just received his new update on four 3.5 inch floppy disks and he followed the instructions supplied with the update to the letter. He had a problem with the machine reading the second disk, just would not accept it. After a few probing questions, a site visit was required, so I attended the next day and was amazed by what I saw. Yes, the guy obviously had a problem reading the second disk after following the installation instructions:

1. Insert disk 1.
2. Run setup, click OK when asked.
3. When asked, insert disk 2.

What I found was that he had not removed the first disk and had actually managed to get both disks into the floppy drive AT THE SAME TIME. Ooops.

**Caller #2:**

**Me:** Hello, Tech Support.

**Caller:** Hello yes, I received this update from you for my new PC, but it cannot read any of the floppy disks you sent me.

**Me:** Hmm. Can you please explain what's happening?

**Caller:** OK, I opened the box and read the instructions telling me to put in disk 1 and run setup.

**Me:** Good; next?

**Caller:** So I got the disks out the box and put the first disk into the drive after removing the protective cover.

**Me:** Protective cover? Do you mean the little white sleeve that the disk comes in?

**Caller:** No the big black cover that the disk comes in. Is it supposed to be that hard to get the disk out?

At this point I fell off my chair, only just managing to put the caller on hold before breaking out in a laughter fit. When I attended his home, he had not only managed to take out the disk from inside the disk casing, he had actually managed to get it lodged into the drive and then broke the heads of the drive when he tried to get it out.

-- darkside

## 7 Memorable lessons

Several years ago, our organization finally got a T1 connection, so everyone suddenly had access to the Internet. The firewall with content filtering software was installed, but we were still playing around with the filtering settings.

Lots of our workers were complete newbies, so I had to teach a class on using browsers and e-mail clients. I had a mixed class of men and women, most of them completely new to computers. One of the guys was a very religious man, and everyone there was well aware of that.

At one point, I asked everyone in the class to enter [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) in the URL box. After a moment, I heard a gasp, followed by everyone in the room busting out in laughter. Seems my religious friend didn't know how to spell "Yahoo" and had instead entered "Yuho." To his shock, and in front of a room full of witnesses, he was immediately transported to a raunchy porn site! The poor guy will never live it down!

-- Quiet\_Type

## 8 If it don't fit...

Back in the early '90s, I was the PC support person for a tire manufacturing plant. Most of the computers had dual floppy drives (5 1/4 & 3.5), but there were some old clunkers (IBM PCs) with only 5 1/4, as well as some state-of-the-art 286 Compaqs with only a 3.5" drive. It is latter that this story is about.

I got a call from a summer engineering student that her disk had gotten stuck in the drive. When I got to the computer I found that she had her work on a 5 1/4" floppy. She was trying to load this work on one of these new Compaqs. The disk was too big, so she decided that, since the material that the floppy is made from is the same, if she were to fold her large floppy in quarters to make it fit the drive then the drive would still read it. Thing is, this person was otherwise a very smart, logical person. I also had a fairly good rapport with her, so I asked her, "How is the drive suppose to spin the disk if it is folded?" The lights came on, cheeks reddened, and she made me promise not to tell ANYONE what just happened. I didn't in that job, but we both had a good laugh.

-- support

## 9 Not a speck of dust

I work for an engineering company. I had an engineer (with an engineering Ph.D., no less) call me about a broken mouse. When I arrived at his office, he showed me the problem by moving the mouse smoothly from one side of the mouse pad to the other while pointing out that the cursor moved in jerks. I showed him how to open the mouse, remove the ball and how to clean the crud from the rollers. After this, the mouse worked perfectly. He was quite happy and I left satisfied that this "problem" had been solved to everyone's satisfaction. However, the next morning, I again received a call from Dr. X to say that his mouse was broken. This time when I arrived, he moved the mouse from one side of the pad to the other while the cursor did not move at all. When I turned the mouse over, I found that our engineer had decided that the mouse was poorly designed to allow all of the dust and debris to enter it. To correct this poor design, he had applied scotch tape over the entire underside of the mouse! I have to admit, he would probably never have had a dirty mouse problem again!

-- ESchlengen

## 10 Most important meal of the day

User: "Is sausage bad for printers?"

To this day, I wish I had replied, "Patties or links?"

-- Mchappell

## Additional resources

- TechRepublic's [Downloads RSS Feed](#) **XML**
- Sign up for the [Downloads at TechRepublic](#) newsletter
- Sign up for our [IT Leadership Newsletter](#)
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)
- [10+ things users say \(and what they really mean\)](#)
- [10 dumb things users do that can mess up their computers](#)
- [The 10 most important things to teach your users](#)

## Version history

**Version:** 2.0

**Published:** November 26, 2008

## Tell us what you think

TechRepublic downloads are designed to help you get your job done as painlessly and effectively as possible. Because we're continually looking for ways to improve the usefulness of these tools, we need your feedback. Please take a minute to [drop us a line](#) and tell us how well this download worked for you and offer your suggestions for improvement.

Thanks!

—The TechRepublic Content Team