



Software by the Numbers, Updates by the Score!

Late last summer, my lovely and charming wife gave me the LOK to go out and buy a digital camera. After considerable searching, I bought the camera in October, and my wife and I really enjoy using it. The problem was that my old black-and-white laser printer (circa 1994) was now totally inadequate. So for Christmas, we bought ourselves a color printer. The printer was labeled “plug and play,” and had a Universal Serial Bus (USB) connection. “How hard could it be to install?” I asked. Well, turns out it was a “plug-and-play-around-with-it” device.

The printer came with no manuals (they were on an included CD) and had a single installation sheet. Basically, the sheet said to install the drivers, and then plug in the printer. Early one afternoon after Christmas, I started the installation. Attempt No. 1 – system locked up when I plugged in the printer. Reboot, watch ScanDisk. Attempt No. 2 – system locked up before I plugged in the printer. Reboot, watch ScanDisk again, and load the manuals from the CD. Find obscure footnote saying, “For initial software installation, the printer cannot be plugged into a USB Hub device.” Attempt No. 3 – Plug printer directly into USB outlet. Results? Same as attempts No. 1 and No. 2, but a much more spectacular lockup. Reboot, (again watch ScanDisk) and reload CD manuals. Find even more obscure footnote saying, “Software may not install correctly if virus detection software is enabled.” Attempt No. 4 – disable virus detection software. SUCCESS!! Time spent – two hours.

You know, shortly before Christmas, I had updated my operating system (OS). The OS installed easily enough but many of my drivers were incompatible. I now know all about searching for and downloading USB drivers and updates for all sorts of devices (Smart Media card reader, Compact Flash card reader, CD burner, camera, old laser printer, virus detection software, PDA synchronization device, and very old scanner). I guess two hours installing a printer was actually pretty quick.

As I was lying in bed late last night, the words to a very old country song kept running through my mind. Remembering that the theme for this issue of CROSSTALK was “Software by the Numbers,” I now offer my version of “Heartache by the Numbers,” originally sung by Ray Price and written by Harlan Howard back in 1959.



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Software by the Numbers

Verse 1

Problem number one was when I installed you.
I thought Win 3.1 would be easy (– so they all say).
And problem number two was moving up to 95,
With DOS 6.22 I should have stayed.

Chorus (Version 1.0)

Now I’ve got software by the numbers, updates by the score.
I’ve got so many peripherals on my USB,
I just can’t plug in any more.
They all should load and coexist,
so their documentation does agree.
Yet every time I update one, three others crash on me.

Verse 2

Problems after number two came so quickly,
Installing 98, ME, 2000 and XP.
With hopeful heart I search for compliant drivers.
The misery of locating and
updating drivers will be the death of me.

Chorus (Version 1.1 with rhythm backward compatible with chorus Version 1.0)

Now I’ve got software by the numbers, drivers by the score.
For each security flaw that I patch, hackers find 10 more.
Well I’ve got software by the numbers,
updating drivers never stops.
‘Cause just as soon as I think I’m done
– my gosh-darn PC locks.

Verse 3

Upgrading and patching software just taxes my brain.
Constant version changes and
new releases just seem to be the rule.
You’d think that all the vendors would end our misery.
Why don’t USB drivers have a configuration management tool?

Chorus (Version 2.0 incompatible with any previous chorus; please uninstall older version of chorus before singing this version of chorus.)

Now I’ve got drivers by the numbers, updates by the score.
I can’t think of a task that I love less, or a task that I hate more.
Suffering from documentation that doesn’t exist,
and manuals that I lack.
I’m going to dump my PC box and return to my old Mac.

This has the potential to be a great country song – it mentions misery, love, hate, hardship, death, and suffering. If I could just work in a reference to my dogs (see my January 2002 BACKTALK column) and a pickup truck, I am sure it would top the charts! See you at Software Technology Conference 2002!

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