

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 162 The End User's Manifesto for Programmers

Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR
715 N. Dries Street
Saukville, WI 53080-1664
(262) 268-1949
skaplan@mcw.edu

Those darn programs! Don't you just hate to install them? They often show a lack of consistency, stupid options, and a "holier than thou" attitude. Well, here are a few of my suggestions for programmers, from an end user's point of view.

EULA – the infamous End Users License Agreement. Clearly, lawyers write them, and no one ever reads them. Why not write them in plain English, shorten them considerably, and make them available for the 3 people out of 100,000 that want to read them. But make them available after the installation. During installation, simply state "it is assumed that by installing this software the user agrees that ...(no more than one or two short sentences here)". Come on folks – lighten up with that legalese!

TAKING TOO LONG TO INSTALL – Some software packages (notably Hewlett-Packard printer installations as an example, but there are others, too) take way too long to install. Up to 30 minutes on a fast Windows 7 machine is just not acceptable by anyone's standards! Taking too long is a clear indication of bloatware and leaves a bad taste in the user's mouth. Stop writing programs in Visual Basic and start hiring programmers who know how to write in machine language. That will cure the problem. And stop including adware for new printer cartridges and paper!

COVERING YOUR ENTIRE SCREEN – Again, Hewlett-Packard (and other programs, too) do this consistently, and there is often not even a minimize button. Therefore, that installation file has complete control of your machine. You, the owner of the machine, have lost control entirely (except for the OFF button). The programmer who wrote that software wants exclusive center stage. Well, guess what, programmers? That is unnecessary and uncalled for. And **I** own my machine, not you!

ASSUMING THE DIRECTORY TO INSTALL TO – Guess what, programmers. Not everyone wants your program installed to C:\Program Files\name of your program). ALWAYS make it possible for the end user to use a different directory, with ease.

REQUIRING A REBOOT – If the programmer was doing their job, this would not be necessary! Many current well-written programs will even detect if a previous version of their software exists, will offer to first uninstall the old version, then will offer to install the newly updated version, all without requiring a reboot. That's the way to do it. Do your job!

ASSUMING QUICK LAUNCH – Many programs offer a Quick Launch (a program icon always present in the system tray when the machine starts), but quite a few check that box for you. Don't do that! If we used Quick Launch for all the programs that offer it, there would be nothing left of memory (RAM). Quick Launch uses precious system resources, by putting part of the program in memory when the machine starts. Let the end user decide when, in those rare cases, a Quick Launch is called for. Don't assume it.

SCREWED UP SLIDER BARS – Those colored bars that are supposed to show you the progress of the installation process. Don't you just love it when a caption says "Installing xxxx" and the

slider bar never moves? ...And never moves. ...And never moves. Then, all of a sudden, the slider bar zips across the screen and the installation is done. Or the opposite case, the eternally moving slider bar. The bar zips across the screen, then again, then again, and again, until the installation is done. Come on, programmers, there are humans sitting in front of that screen! We want to know the progress and the rate of progress. Show us a 50% slider bar when the program is half done installing. Make those sliders meaningful to the folks that own the machines.

OK, I have “vented my spleen.” Let me finish with an observation. You can pretty much tell how good a program is going to be by watching its installation program. If the installation is smooth and quick, the program is going to be that way, too. If it is slow and klunky with lots of the “don’t do that” things mentioned above, it is not a good sign. Keep that in mind. Thank goodness we can easily uninstall programs!

Have I missed any in the “don’t do that” list above? I invite you to email me one of your pet peeves concerning installations.

Happy Computing!