

'User stupid' is a 10-minute address label

By Mike Quigley (c) 1985
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One of the first things I did when I bought my printer was try to make a mailing label — for a single envelope!

Can you think of anything so dumb? After getting the envelope into the printer with great difficulty and lining it up correctly, I pushed all the right buttons — and everything fouled up. This went on for three or four envelopes. Finally I got my finished product after 10 minutes or so. I could probably have written the address on the envelope in 20 seconds.

This little escapade demonstrates what I like to call a "user stupid." It's the opposite of "user friendly," a term which has been used a lot in reference to both the VIC 20 and Commodore 64.

I personally don't find much "friendly" about these two popular computers. In order to be truly friendly with the 64, you have to spend a lot of time perusing a Reference Guide which is nearly 500 pages thick! If cars came with such a complicated, massive manual, we'd probably still see a lot of horses and buggies around.

The instruction book for the "friendly" 1541 disk drive is one of the most inept creations to ever accompany a major retail product. One of its howler instructions is, "Never remove the diskette when the green drive light is on!" This is sort of like saying, "Never get out of the car once you've placed the key in the ignition."

"User stupid" could be defined as "doing things with your computer which can be done faster by other means." One of my favorite dumb reasons why people buy computers is "to store my recipes." I have all my recipes clipped out of newspapers and pasted in a couple of school exercise books. Unless you're a gourmet cook with a vast collection of recipes, there really isn't much point to using a computer. Every time you want to cook, will you have to haul everything up to the kitchen counter where it will be covered with flour, baking powder, oil and so forth? Let's get serious!

Other user stupidies can be found with accounting and tax programs and "home inventories" which make relatively simple tasks into truly complicated ones. User stupidies are not restricted to the programs themselves, however — many features of programs

are dumbly designed.

Take for example Cardco's VIC-20 version of Write Now! word processor where a joystick can be used to scroll text up and down the screen. Instead of using the cursor keys, which is eminently more logical, you have to find the joystick, pick it up, move the text around, put the joystick down and return your fingers to the keyboard after finding the right place to put them. Even if the joystick is bolted to the table near the computer, using it doesn't make any ergonomic sense. The same can be said of Electronic Arts' Music Construction Set which uses a joystick for inputs.

Editor's note: Mike Quigley has written other articles about "user stupidies" in the Vancouver Commodore Computer Club News, of which he is editor.

According to him, my habit of typing RUN with "rU" is "user stupid" because it doesn't really save any keystrokes.

I suggest that another user stupid is the super-high-priced IBM PC which asks you to enter the day's date every time you power up. A \$3 digital watch will keep track of the date for the year or so that its battery lasts, but IBM's multi-buck wonder can't!

Readers are invited to send in their favorite examples of "user stupidies" either directly to Mike or to INPUT. Perhaps we should offer a Golden Mouse award for the dumbest computer innovation!