

# RANDOM

William Blinn  
COMMUNICATIONS

179 Caren Avenue  
Worthington, Ohio 43085  
614-785-9359  
Fax 877-870-4892  
www.Blinn.com

July 2006

COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

# THOUGHTS

## High tech and high touch: The winning combination.

In the past, I've grumbled about customer service, or lack of it. A local supplier of copiers and other office equipment used to run radio ads about being a high-tech and high-touch company. I don't know how well they followed through on the promise, but it was a good advertising platform because far too many high-tech companies fall down when it comes to providing support.

There are advantages in buying a computer from HellPaqWay (a combination of HP, Dell, Compaq, and Gateway). I can't think of any at the moment, but there must be some. There are also advantages in dealing with a local assembler who has a good reputation and uses quality parts.

Recently, I upgraded my computer to a dual-core processor with 2GB of RAM and a couple of big Seagate SATA drives. On Friday evening before Memorial Day, some newly downloaded music wasn't playing well in iTunes. At the same time, the mouse became "sticky". My music is all on an external USB device and the mouse is a USB device. Might that be the problem? I swapped mice. No change. Copied the music to one of the internal drives. No change. Tried playing music with known-good files. No change.

Then I started seeing blue screens and the occasional black screen of death. In some cases, everything was fine on restart, but sometimes I'd go through 2 or 3 blue screens or black screens just to get the machine to start. Clearly there was a serious problem and it appeared to be a hardware issue.

### Hardware problem. Holiday weekend.

Quickly copied the files I knew I'd need during the weekend onto a USB drive so that I could take them to the Mac and work on them.

At 2:30pm on Saturday I sent a note to the support address of the company that assembled the machine. I knew they would be closing at 3 and expected not to hear anything until Tuesday. Ten minutes later, I had a reply: *We're closing at 3, but here's my home e-mail address. Try swapping out the memory modules to see if that makes a difference.*

I removed the B module and tried restarting. Crash. I removed the A module and placed the former B module in the A slot. Initially the machine crashed, but I tried again. Success. No crashes. Seven hours later, I shut the machine down and went to bed. There had been no problems.

I felt a little stupid that I hadn't thought of swapping memory modules on my own, but the problems I was

experiencing looked like they involved the USB hubs or the sound subsystem. Memory is easy enough to test and I should have done that on my own.

Sunday, the computer ran fine all day. In the morning, I received an e-mail from another technician: *I'm in the office today and will be here some of Monday if you want to bring the computer by, I'll run some tests.* Just try to imagine that happening with CompUSA. I replied to that e-mail with a summary of the testing I'd done. The problem is clearly a failed memory module.

A follow-up response from the company: They would replace both modules because having exactly matched DIMMs is important. They didn't have any of those modules in stock, but they would order them. On Thursday, the new memory modules arrived and I installed them.

In the meantime, I had a computer that ran fine (well, maybe a bit slower than it might have with both memory modules, but fast enough for me to get my work done.) And the company continues to have a satisfied customer.

The company, by the way, is TCR Computers in Pickerington (a Columbus, Ohio, suburb). They have built their reputation the way they build their machines – with care. They deal mainly with local customers, but they will assemble and ship machines, too. Their (ugly) website is at [www.TCR.com](http://www.TCR.com).

Not once in any message from TCR did I read canned comments about wanting to provide "World Class Customer Service" or "meeting and exceeding" my needs. TCR doesn't need to tell people that they're providing outstanding support for one simple reason: They are already providing outstanding support. Actions, as I was told many years ago, speak louder than words.



## Deep in the Congo

Have you ever followed a search engine link only to find that the website you've gone to has "premium content" that requires a subscription fee that you must pay before you'll be allowed to see the article you want? Newspapers and magazines pay writers and editors to prepare content, so they can't be expected to give it away for free. But if you're doing research that takes you to a premium content link that you

won't need on an ongoing basis, will you be willing to pony up \$25 or \$50 or \$100? Most people won't. A new service called Congoo might have a solution.

Congoo will give you free access to premium content. It's legal and the providers of the premium content support the idea. So now you're really suspicious, right?

Here's the trick: Congoo doesn't give you unlimited permanent access to premium content. It provides access to several articles free every month from each of our partner publishers. What's the definition of "several"? That number varies by publisher.

That doesn't mean there's a problem with Congoo. But it does mean that you have to understand that you don't have unlimited free access to all the premium content on the Web.

But if you need one-time (or occasional) access to Financial Times, Newsday, AdWeek, or any of the other publications, shown above, Congoo can provide that access for free.

### The problem for content providers

People who write for newspapers, magazines, radio, and television expect to be paid. They have this expectation because when they visit the grocery store, McDonald's, the shoe store, or the local bar, those folks expect to be paid for the products they provide. But people who visit media sites expect to get the information for free.

Radio and television (with the exception of public radio and public television) work on the advertising model. Listeners and viewers are willing to accept ads in return for the content. Newspapers and magazines generally work on a modified version of the advertising model: Part of the cost is paid by subscription and the rest is paid by advertisers. In the case of controlled circulation publications and free newspapers, the advertising component pays the entire cost.

Some people don't see the value of the information, particularly if they need something from a publication only once or twice. Congoo might change those perceptions. If you need information from, say, the Financial Times only once, you wouldn't subscribe. But if you find that the Financial Times routinely has information you consider to be useful, your perception may change.

If a publication allows 5 free viewings per month, that might be enough to convince some people that the cost of the subscription is worth paying to gain full access to the publication's information. This could work for publications such as the Financial Times or AdWeek, for example, but might not be as successful for the Virginia Pilot or Harvard Health Publications.

If you want to give it a try, visit [www.Congoo.com](http://www.Congoo.com).

## Too much disk space?

I've told the story more than once of buying a 16MB hard drive for around \$1000. Now, of course, a 16MB flash drive is something you might find in your breakfast cereal as a prize. 500MB flash drives go for \$20 or so. And even 1GB flash drives can be had for less than \$50. I'm astonished whenever I think of having more than 1TB of disk space on-line and I recently added another 300GB of storage



for less than \$150. The disk drive (a rebate was involved) cost less than \$100 and, because the disk drive was a Seagate SATA unit, I had to pay more than expected for a case with a USB2 connection. Overall, I spent less than \$150 for the drive and the case. That works out to about about 5 cents per megabyte instead of \$63 per megabyte. Wow!

I'd planned to put the drive in an external case that I'd had lying around for a while, but the case was for standard EIDE drives. It didn't have any serial ATA connections, either data or power. And the cases I found in my initial search were in the \$75 and up range.

Then I found a case (from China, of course) for about \$20. It's a neat case – thick aluminum with the appropriate hardware for attaching the drive to the base.

Add up the space available on the drives connected to my computer, you may be as surprised as I am:

C = 200 GB (installed boot drive)

D = 500 GB (installed data drive)

M = 200 GB (music and photographs, external USB device)

N = 150 GB (mainly work files, external USB device)

Y = 300 GB (new external backup, external USB device)

That's more than a terabyte of storage space attached to my computer. I keep hearing that a terabyte will be standard on even notebook computers within 10 years and I'm still amazed because I remember headlines in computer magazines that asked "Is 1GB enough?" and I remember when 16MB seemed like more space than anyone would ever need.

Clearly, 16 MB wasn't enough. Neither was 1GB. And neither is 1TB. As we continue to depend on computers to store our music, our photos, and our lives, there is no such thing as too much disk space.

## CORNER on the market by A.J. Stinnett

*"The first rule of decision making is that decisions require disagreement."*