Did you go shopping on Christmas day?

I received a message from SuperMediaStore on December 22nd, an on-line store that I've used to acquire CDs, DVDs, laser toner cartridges, and such. The e-mail was about last-minute specials leading up to Christmas, but it took a different tack—a clever approach.

Most brick-and-mortar stores are closed on Christmas day and some are closed the day after. People want to be home with their families and store owners don't want to be seen as ogres. They also don't want to pay quadruple or quintuple overtime, or whatever it is they pay people who work on Christmas day.

But the Web is there every day. A well designed website doesn't need to have people standing by to help, except for the system administrators who keep an eye on the servers and the connections. So what if you advertised some specials that were good only on Christmas day along with your last-minute specials?

Examining the logic

Most people are home on Christmas day. Many use their computers. More than half of the people with computers have high-speed Internet access. Some will be willing to place orders on Christmas day if they get a bargain.

Add 1-day-only specials for Christmas Day to specials for the 22nd, the 23rd, and the 24th, and you might have a winner for everyone involved.

Maybe other on-line store owners have done this. If so, I haven't received their promotions. No matter how many store owners used this approach in 2006, I'll bet that a lot more will

use it in 2007. There's little or no cost involved in creating the promotion and the result will be sales on a day that would otherwise have registered few sales. This is "found money" for the store. It doesn't require that a lot of people work on the holiday and that's a winner for the employees and their families. And customers get a bargain.

I have just one question: Why didn't I think of this? ß

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The death of an Ipod

The *Wall Street Journal* recently carried an article about dying (or murdered) Ipods. Battery problems, cracked screens, and crashed hard drives are among the problems users report. Most Ipods have hard drives that are used to store music, pictures, and video; hard drives don't like to be moved when they're running.

I exercise most days at the Worthington Community Center and I see a lot of Ipods. When I exercise, I usually have my XM radio which is tuned to the Bob Edwards show, delayed from that morning. XM radios store programs on solid-state media, so there's no fear of motion. But motion and vibration aren't the only threats faced by the Ipod.

Do not submerge the Ipod

My younger daughter drowned her Ipod (version 3) and had to buy her own replacement. She took it, in her purse, to a concert. Torrential rain caught everyone by surprise and when she pulled the Ipod out of her purse, she noticed water inside the screen. She tried to turn it on, which is probably what sealed the Ipod's fate. Later, I was able to disassemble the device and let the water evaporate, but it never played again.

When I bought Kaydee's Ipod, I bought a second copy for me. I didn't drown mine, but the battery no longer provided more than a few minutes of play time. I purchased a replacement battery because I knew how to take an Ipod apart and put it back together, thanks to Kaydee's sacrificial device. My Ipod is still running—with a new battery—in part because I use it in a stationary position most of the time.

But people do want to use Ipods while they're walking, running, or otherwise exercising. I see them regularly when I work out.

Apple has done a good job of designing the devices. Only about 5% of Ipods suffer catastrophic failures. That's not bad, really, unless yours is one of the 5%. The *Wall Street Journal* article quoted Steve Dowling, an Apple spokesman, as saying the failure rate is "extremely low" when compared with other electronics devices.

Complaints about the battery are probably the most common issues. Apple settled a class-action suit based on battery problems by giving owners of some Ipods credit certificates. Initially, Apple offered a $200 battery replacement program, reduced the price to $100, and finally cut it to a more reasonable $70. The Ipod case has no screws and must be carefully pried apart with special tools. Users can buy $35 replacement batteries, but they'll need to carefully follow directions. Break it and Apple will sell you another.

As cool as the Ipod is, and I love mine, it's still an extremely fragile device. Eventually solid-state-memory devices will replace the Ipod because solid-state devices require much less power and they are not susceptible to damage caused by being carried around. Or dropped.

The *Wall Street Journal* article says "As pricey as many models of the Ipods are, some users seem to accept the idea that their Ipods are more or less disposable."

If I spend more than $200 for something, it is *not* "more or less disposable." Sheesh. ß

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What's running and why?

I t's sometimes difficult to tell the good stuff from the bad stuff using just the Windows Task Manager because Windows runs a number of its own processes and applications you install may spawn processes with odd names. At the right is a view of the task manager showing the 81 processes currently running on my computer.

Some are clearly running because I want them to. These include autoreply (an autoresponder) and several avg* applications (antivirus). Less obvious processes include a variety of g2* processes (GoToMyPC), dfragntfs (Diskeeper), and 2 instances of mysqld-nt (MySQL server). What about khalmnpr and retrorun? Some genius at Logitech decided to name one of the processes used by the mouse "khalmnpr"; "lmouse" or "logitech" would have been too obvious. Retrorun is part of the Dantz Retrospect Backup application, which I no longer use, so it shouldn't be running.

You can find out who owns many of these processes at the Process Library website: www.processlibrary.com/.

If your computer has been slowing down, too many processes may be competing for processor time. Some processes can safely be turned off, but not all.

It's better to err on the side of safety, so if you're not absolutely certain that shutting a service down or killing a process will have no detrimental effect on the computer, leave it alone and seek advice from somebody who does know. Shut down the wrong process and you may have a computer that won't start. Recovery could be as easy as using the Last Known Good configuration or as messy as reinstalling the operating system. Making changes on a whim is unwise.

Lots of ways to start something

W indows has many ways to start programs. They can be in an individual user's StartUp folder, in the "all users" StartUp folder, in the Default user's StartUp folder, in the current user's Run or RunOnce section of the Registry, in the "all users" Run or RunOnce section of the Registry, in the Default user's Run or RunOnce section of the Registry, or in the (deprecated) win.ini file, which XP can still process on startup.
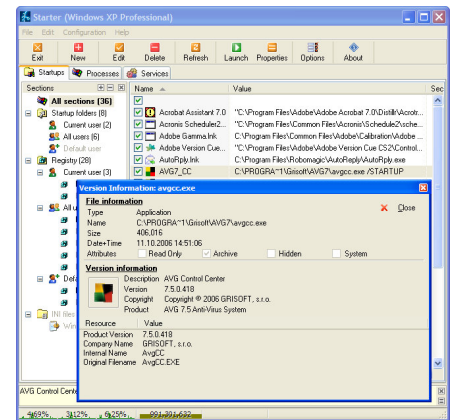
If you have a corporate IT department, your system administration may have set specific security policies that run applications on startup and effectively make it impossible for you to make any changes. Nothing you read here should be used in a corporate environment without the sysadmin's explicit permission.

A free application called Starter can show all startup applications regardless of how they are started and it can temporarily shut down an application, disable it, or delete it. If you've confirmed that a running application or process is something that you don't want to have running, first shut it down. If the computer still operates normally, disable the application and restart the computer.

Don't be in a hurry to delete the application. If it's disabled, it won't use any processor time. Wait for a few weeks and watch for unwanted side effects.

You can download Starter from the CodeStuff website, codestuff.cjb.net. ß