

A Strip of Silver Trim



Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

A couple years ago, my children informed me they needed a new computer. They had to run some software that

required Windows, and Microsoft gets way too much money if you buy a box copy of Windows outright, so I quickly convinced myself to go shopping for hardware.

I went to a store that had just opened in my town. It advertised low-cost PCs, but there was nothing low-rent about this fancy store. It looked like a Mercedes dealership. Brilliantly colored posters beamed the reader within, where the theme was Windows Windows Windows – the latest and most brilliantly colored Windows. Bright lights shone on little pedestals with parts of PCs positioned to present the most alluring shadows.

The room was crawling with salesmen. The vast number was no doubt intended to provide a one-to-one ratio of employees to patrons, which reminded me of a bar I had visited once in Tijuana, but I didn't share the memory. A young man approached me. He tried to interest me in a wall-mounted monitor with approximately the acreage of Picasso's Guernica. I told him I wanted something smaller, and he sold me a sleek, small PC with an attractive strip of silver trim running down the center of the casing.

I took the computer home. Everyone was impressed with the attractive silver trim strip. We all used the system for a

while, then it started to gather dust, so I decided to sneak it out of the house and install Fedora on it.

The installation went flawlessly, but then the door to the DVD player jammed and I couldn't get the DVD out. I couldn't figure out a way to eject the DVD, and I soon discovered that I couldn't even find a way to open the case. It held fast like a puzzle box.

I called the hotline number at the vendor's website.

"Sir," a voice told me, "your computer is no longer in warranty."

"You can't even tell me how to open the DVD drawer?"

"I'm not supposed to."

I convinced him he should tell me rather than listening to me get mad.

"Oh, just stick a pin into the little hole under the DVD drawer," he said.

"I know the trick with the little hole," I told him, "but there is no little hole." "There's always a little hole, sir," he said, speaking as one who was overly accustomed to being polite.

Now I really was angry. I started prodding and yanking at the computer case. Soon I had yanked off the attractive silver trim strip, and I quickly discovered that, beneath it, utterly inaccessible to anyone who didn't know the secret, was the little hole that opened the DVD player.

"What a bad design!" I shouted. The superfluous trim strip actually prevented users from performing necessary service operations. I drove to the fancy computer store to tell them what I thought about their product, and I discovered that the



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store had suddenly and unexpectedly gone out of business. So the moral is that bad design really does sometimes lose.

I emailed the vendor and asked if I could have one of the brilliantly colored posters as a souvenir of the store. They did not respond, and presumably they were not amused.

Joe

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