

Non-resolution of the dead home desktop problem

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Last time, I told of attempting to upgrade my home computer and failing. I ultimately gave up and returned the parts to the store, telling them that I thought the IDE controller on the motherboard was dead. They refunded my money after a false step where they refunded me more than I paid for the components in the first place! (I bought the motherboard and CPU as a bundle, but the person who rang up the return treated them as two separate items and ended up refunding me the full price instead of the bundled price. It's one thing to return a defective product and get your money back. But to *turn a profit* doing so is downright wrong.) Thus bereft of computer equipment, I drove down to the local Fry's and bought a bottom-of-the-line computer which would merely serve as a shell for all my working equipment. I would be using the motherboard, CPU, memory, and case from the computer, but I didn't care for the other stuff since I would be performing an "instant upgrade" with the old computer's DVD drive and hard drives. It cost about \$60 more than the parts I bought from the failed upgrade attempt, but the saved grief was well worth it. Skipping ahead in the story: After I got the machine up and running, I plugged one of my old hard drives into the machine and... the BIOS recognized it, and the volume mounted just fine. On the other hand, I can't access the files on the drive yet. I don't have a domain at home (I'm not that big of a geek), so my SID on the new computer is different from my SID on the old computer. My new account can't access files created by the old account. I would have to do some SID history magic to get access to the files protected by my old SID, but I'm just going to take the lazy way out and do a recursive "replace ACLs" on all the files on the old hard drives. (This requires multiple passes, though. First I have to take ownership, then I can change the ACLs after I become the owner.) Now about that new computer. It comes with Windows XP Media Center Edition, even though the video card doesn't have a DVI connector. I was kind of baffled by this. If you're going to run Media Center Edition, doesn't that mean you're highly likely to hook it up to some awesome flat-panel display for watching your videos? I don't quite understand why this bottom-of-the-line computer with an analog-only video card bothered to install Media Center Edition. Who are they fooling? Okay, so I'm going to have to upgrade the video card, too. That increases the cost delta over the parts to around \$160. Still worth it though. One of the odd features of the new computer is that it has a 9-in-1 multi card reader built into the front panel. This is a cute feature, but it is also frustrating since it gobbles up four drive letters. But that's okay. I already described how you can fix this when I

talked about the infinitely recursive directory tree. I created a directory called `C:\CARDS` and inside it created directories `C:\CARDS\CF` , `C:\CARDS\SD` , and so on. I then used the Disk Management snap-in to de-assign drive letters from each of those card readers and instead mounted each card reader into the corresponding folder I had created. Now I can access the contents of the CF reader by going to `C:\CARDS\CF` . One thing that really frustrates me about off-the-shelf computers is all the shovelware that comes with them. I fire up the computer and my notification area is filled with useless icons I don't want to see again, with more stupid programs jammed themselves into the Run key. No, I don't need an AOL monitor running. No, I don't need QuickTime pre-loaded. No, I don't need a program to monitor my card readers and do some evil icon chicanery. The evil icon chicanery is particularly gruesome because every time I log on, I get a dialog box that looks like this:



fAIL

Good job there, stupid evil icon program. I bet you assume the user is an administrator. The computer also came with a recovery partition. I hate those too. Today's status is that I'm not out of the woods yet. I have a working computer, I can mount my old hard drives (though it'll take work to get access to the files), I still have to upgrade the optical drive to the rewritable DVD drive that I had in the old computer. I still have to get rid of all the shovelware that came with the system. I still have to reinstall the drivers for my rewritable DVD drive and printer. (I'm sure I have that CD around here somewhere.) And I still have to get a new video card that supports digital output so I can use an LCD panel.

Some improvements:

- USB 2.0 ports. (My old computer had only 1.0.)
- The fans shut off in standby mode. (My old computer left the fans running, which negated much of the benefit of standby mode.)
- “Shut down and restart” actually works. (For some reason, my old computer was incapable of restarting.)
- The new computer is a lot quieter.

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