

Radio Days – 2013-03-23

Tip of the Week – Num Lock Not Working

I recently bought a new wireless keyboard and mouse. This is a real delight because there are no cords to get tangled up in anything on my desk. The only problem that I have noticed so far is that if one of my cats sleeps too close to my new keyboard it loses its connection to my computer. Cats, apparently, are not transparent to the wireless signal which connects my keyboard to the little connector which sits in a USB port on the back of my computer.

All was well with my new keyboard and mouse (despite having two cats in my house!) for the first month or two then the numeric part of the keyboard started doing funny things. When typing numbers the mouse pointer started jumping all over the place instead of typing the numbers which I had expected to see.

This meant that the num lock key had died. I tried the obvious things like turning the keyboard upside down and shaking to see if any rubbish fell out. Nothing!

I tried turning my computer off then back on again. Again, nothing!

The only option was to take my new keyboard, mouse and connector back to the shop and ask them to replace it. This they did with apologies. I replaced it with another keyboard and mouse from the same manufacturer and this has now been working for about the last two months. All being well this is a good product.

Sometimes the problems occur even with new products. Just be prepared to diagnose those problems.

This Goes With That At ...

During the week I had a call from a client who had moved his computer while some work was done, then found that it would not work when he replaced it in its normal position. This was a major problem as he needed it for his home-based business and even a day without his computer was sending him round the twist.

The first thing, of course, was to check all the connections, making sure that they were in the correct hole or socket. There were many errors, all of them concerned with the plugs which go into the sockets on the back of a desktop computer. Please remember that each socket that has a wire plugged into it must have the other end of the wire plugged into another socket. If either end of the wire is not connected correctly then that connection will not work.

Let's look at these plugs and sockets one by one.

- All computer plugs had different matching sockets of the same size and shape. The most common ones are the USB plugs: these are flat with a blocking insert to ensure that you cannot insert them the wrong way round. The sockets also have a blocking insert to ensure that you can only insert the plug correctly. Many people have not noticed that there is a small USB logo which looks like a three-pronged fork. This side with the logo goes "up" when plugged into a USB socket. "Up", of course, can have many meanings, particularly when the motherboard is placed vertically as it is on every desktop computer.
- There are power cords. These have the familiar two- or three-pronged plugs at one end and this is inserted into either a wall socket or, in many cases, into a power board. The other end, for most computer power cords, has a three-hole plug with tapered corners to ensure that you can only insert it into the socket with the right orientation. This gives a device like a computer or monitor the power which it needs to function.
- Another type of plug is used to connect your computer and your modem. This plug is for a connection called ethernet, and it usually has a little clip on it to prevent it from being pulled out inadvertently. This clip also lets you know which way up the plug should be inserted.

- A similar plug is used to connect a telephone cord either to a modem (for the internet) or to a card in the back of the computer (for a fax or dial-up internet access). This cord also has a clip on the back to show which way it should be inserted and to prevent it from being pulled out inadvertently.
- Monitors or screens are connected to your computer with one of a number of plugs. Sometimes a new monitor will arrive with up to four cords: the one to be used depends on the video card which has a socket matching one of the sockets on the back of your monitor. Please ensure that you only use one plug to connect your monitor to your tower.

USB in an Ethernet Socket

My client had made some of the classic mistakes. His computer had one ethernet socket for connecting to a modem. Because ethernet sockets are the same width as a USB socket and usually sit next to two USB sockets, he had placed a USB plug into his computer's ethernet socket. This, of course, meant that this USB cord could not work. It also meant that he could not connect his modem because there was no spare ethernet socket.

The simple solution, because he had more than enough USB sockets, was to remove the USB plug from the ethernet socket and place it in a spare USB socket. This meant that there was a socket for the ethernet connection to the modem.

One thing which worries many people is the range of USB sockets. They then worry that they will insert the wrong USB cord into a socket. The USB system is designed so that it doesn't matter if you change the socket that a USB cord is plugged into: the computer will take care of any problems which may arise.

Just make sure that you insert your USB plugs into a USB socket: the ethernet socket has no connections for USB plugs!

Two Cords Connecting a Monitor

He had two cords connecting his tower to his monitor. This is a classic error for modern computers with modern monitors just now. Monitors are now coming with greater resolution so they need faster connections to keep the screen refreshed quickly. You will know what I mean if you have a TV and you notice that sometimes a live connection is lost for a moment so that it freezes while the connection catches up with the broadcast.

Removing the older cord fixed that problem.

Dangling Cords

A common problem which I encounter is having one end of a cord plugged into the correct socket and either the other end dangling in mid-air or another cord of the correct type plugged into the matching socket.

If you do this there will be one or two dangling cords. Dangling cords are a sure sign that there is a problem. Always check that each cord has both ends plugged into a socket of the correct type. If you have dangling cords then I can guarantee you that there will be a problem.

Further Information

Nothing this week.