



Vinegar and Dye Pellets Not Included

I've learned that a fundamental rule of good writing and public speaking is to grab your audience with a witty, relevant opener that sets the tone for the remainder of the presentation. I intend to ignore this rule. Instead, I'll try to follow the standard established by software symposium speakers, which is to open with a corny joke that is only nominally related to the subject matter at hand:

Q: What is an Ethernet?

A: Something you use to catch the Ether bunny!

Ha-ha! And if that one has you doubled up on the floor in wheezing convulsions, hold on to that oxygen mask for another big jolt: That's the only joke in this column. And it's just as well, because what software developers do is no laughing matter, such as fixing the latest round of post-release flaws that were inserted while fixing the previous round of post-release flaws, or being tasked to implement your organization's objective of "leveraging team empowerment to facilitate synergistic initiatives," or attending weekly staff meetings.

However, the "Ether bunny" joke is somewhat related to this month's fatally grim software topic—software Easter eggs—because it affords me the opportunity to share some rambling, unrelated Easter nostalgia.

When I was a child, near this time every year, my siblings and I would lie awake and excitedly listen to the bunny in the next room romp through the house delivering hidden goodies. We knew that the next morning, we would be leaping from our beds the moment we heard those magical words: "There are rabbit doots behind the couch and the stereo wire's been gnawed through!" Dad would yell. "Who left the @!#% rabbit cage open last night?"

However, sometimes *another* bunny would come to our house and leave *chocolate* Easter eggs! But we won't be talking about the candy eggs that children snarf down on Easter Sunday before wiping their hands of the matter on the upholstery, forgetting the sugary feast by the following Thursday when it wears off and they finally go to sleep again. No, we'll be talking about the hidden bonuses found in software called *Easter eggs*, which is geek jargon for "the real reason a stupid word processing program takes up 20 MB of disk space."

But forget the cute-but-useless Easter eggs like cheat codes in "Doom," or the Magic Eight Ball in "Access," or 3-D developer credits in "Delphi." Instead, I'll reveal some simple key combinations that, when held down all at the same time, open some of the most powerful Easter eggs in programs you may already use.

Microsoft PowerPoint – (+Esc+&+F11) Makes slides look less like they were created by an engineer. Limits number of boxes and arrows per slide to 25, and limits dissimilar pieces of clip art per slide to 12. Changes clashing color combinations like pink and orange to a more pleasing burgundy and neon purple.

Novell GroupWise – (Scroll Lock+Å+~+9) Interprets E-mail from management, as seen in the following verbatim example.

Original: "Seeing as our budgetary blah blah blah, we can foresee a shortfall in this, that, and the other, forcing us to mumbo jumbo gumbo. Your future input will prevent any unexpected yada yada yada."

Interpretation: "I'm too brilliant to have caused this mess, so the problem must be with you. Hey, now that I've hit that little envelope button, can someone show me how to run this E-mail through the postage meter?"

Lotus 1-2-3 – (Shift+4+#+*) Puts a little frowny face [:-(] next to numbers that are based on faulty logic. Figures that are massaged according to someone's political agenda are displayed in flashing neon green while the song "Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire" plays in the background (sound card required).

Norton AntiVirus – (Shift+\$+β+Æ) Cleans off not only malignant viruses but also *anything* politically damaging from your drive, including unsent hate mail, nonmission-related Web hits, and plagiarized material sources.

Microsoft Windows '95 – (Ctrl+Alt+Delete) Drastically improves system reliability and performance by zapping flawed, error-prone software. (For best results, insert a Linux installation disk in the "A" drive immediately prior.)

Adobe PageMaker – (Esc+Ctrl+F7+⊞) Automatically generates a witty closing line when you can't think of one.

– Lorin May

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