

# The hierarchy of user education, as interpreted by a vice president

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One of my colleagues told me a story from his days on the Windows team. He had to give a presentation to his vice president on his feature, and he prepared his presentation and demo obsessively to make sure it went smoothly. At the meeting, there were three presentations on the schedule, all of them with features targeting IT professionals. The first presenter got up and walked through their feature. Upon reaching a particular tricky part of the feature, the vice president asked, “How are customers going to know how to set up those parameters?” The presenter explained, “We’ll have a whitepaper explaining how to set them up.” The vice president growled, “I ☆ hate whitepapers.” The second presenter’s feature was also rather complicated, and the vice president asked the same question. “How are customers supposed to know how to set this up?” The second presenter explained, “We’ll use a wizard to step them through it.” The vice president snarled, “If there’s anything I hate more than ☆ whitepapers, it’s ☆ wizards.” All through this, my colleague was waiting for his turn to present, and one of his nervous habits is to re-run the demo over and over while waiting, making sure it runs smoothly each time. His particular demo required a good amount of effort to reset after each go-round, and just as luck would have it, he was called to present while he was in the middle of resetting his demo. He rushed through the reset as he got up to do his presentation. My colleague ran through his presentation, but the demo fell apart because he didn’t reset his scenario properly. In fact, he got the system into a bad state, because he had been messing with various settings not exposed to users directly. The vice president asked, “How are customers supposed to recover when they get into this state?”

Having watched the first two presentations, my colleague had a good handle on the vice president’s mood. He replied, “They’re ☆ed.”

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