How do you get network connectivity from the worst PC in the world?

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Some time ago, I wrote about the two worst PCs ever. The worst PC of all time, according to *PC World* magazine was the Packard Bell PC. As installed at the factory, the computer came with every single expansion slot filled. Need to add a peripheral to your computer? Ha-ha, you can't!

Now, this was in the days before motherboards had integrated network adapters, and a network adapter was not one of the expansion cards that came preinstalled. But I needed to get network access in order to install the latest builds, and I teased at the end of the article that I had to resort to other devious means of obtaining network connectivity.

Nobody ever asked me to follow up on that teaser, but I'm going to answer it anyway. "So, Raymond, how did you get network connectivity on a computer that had no network adapter and nowhere to plug in a network adapter card?"

Of course, the cheat would be to unplug one of the existing expansion cards (the dial-up modem was a good candidate), but that would remove a piece of hardware that the senior executive's identical home PC was using.

My solution was to use a little-known feature of Windows 95 known as Direct Cable Connection, or DCC. DCC allowed you to use your parallel port as a network adapter. (I am not making this up.) I obtained a special cable from the manager of the DCC project and hooked up one end to the Packed Bell PC and the other end to my main development machine, which acted as a bridge between the Packard Bell PC and the rest of the corporate network.

I installed new builds of Windows 95 this way, which was a great source of amusement (and by amusement, I mean *frustration*) to the Windows 95 setup team, who found themselves dealing with failures that occurred on a network configuration most of them had never heard of. (But which, realistically, was one of the flakiest network configurations in the world.)

I also ran nightly stress tests this way, which offered a similar degree of amusement/frustration to whatever developer had to investigate the failures turned up by the accursed machine. For example, one of the things that made debugging difficult was that if you broke into the kernel debugger for too long, the DCC network connection dropped, and you lost network connectivity.

I think it's kind of fitting that the worst PC in the world also offered the worst debugging experience in the world.

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