

# The custom-made computers powered by pepperoni pizza

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During the development of Windows NT, testing identified that a very specific model of computer from a major manufacturer exhibited a very large number of problems, and the team needed about a dozen of them in order to debug the issues.

Unfortunately, the test team didn't have twelve of them. Okay, they didn't have any at all.

The person who told this story (let's call her Alice) said that a phone call to the manufacturer confirmed that the model was no longer in production. There was no way to order them.

The administrative assistants checked their hardware inventory and searched through their storage closets of spare hardware to see if they could find any computers of this specific model.

No luck.

Alice called the manufacturer again and explained that she really, really, really, desperately needed twelve copies of that specific discontinued model of computer in order to debug, identify, and fix the problems that they were having with Windows NT. The manufacturer searched their own warehouses, but no luck. The systems simply didn't exist.

The company agreed to take the extraordinary step of shutting down one of their normal production lines and converting it to produce the now-discontinued model.

To make twelve computers.

It took around two days to do this. When Alice learned that an entire production line of people were working overtime in their warehouse to produce this one-shot run of computers just for her, she figured it would be nice to send them some pizza or something as a thank-you.

Remember, this is around 1992. There was no Internet in the form we recognize it today. There were at most 50 Web servers in the world, all of them belonging to academic and research institutions. The first online pizza order was still two years away. How do you order pizza for people in another state?

She called directory information for the city that the production facility was in. “What do you guys have over there for delivery pizza? Oh, there’s a Dominos? Can you give me their number? Thanks.”

“Hello, Dominos? I’d like to order a bunch of pizza for delivery to the XYZ computer factory. Do you know where that is? Great. So how about a dozen pizzas, assorted toppings. And a case of soda. Yup. Do you take corporate Amex? Oh, you don’t accept credit cards of any kind over the phone.”

In this era, payment by credit card was typically done by mechanical imprint, which required the card’s physical presence.

Okay, so you want to order a bunch of pizza, and you’re on the phone to the pizza place in another state, and they don’t take credit cards over the phone. What options do you have?

“Will you take a corporate check which I promise to put in the mail?”

She was sure this wouldn’t work.

“You will?!”

So that’s how a dozen computers of a discontinued model from a major manufacturer were created for the specific purpose of debugging why Windows NT wasn’t working. They were powered by pepperoni pizza, with the help of a trusting stranger.

(I don’t know for sure, but I suspect the corporate check included a generous tip.)

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