LISA '02

Nobody Notices Until It's Broken: Self–Marketing for Sysadmins

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What's the problem?

Many (most?) people who hire, manage, and work with system administrators see a person (or persons) who sit at their desk, or walk the halls, not apparently doing much of anything. Yet they pay us a considerable sum of money (or so they feel.)

How do we educate our management, co–workers and others about what we do and why it is important?

What do you tell Aunt Tillie?

☞ How do you explain what you do to people who don't do it?

Anecdote/Comment #1

"During student orientation, we tell them to look at us like an American Express Card: Don't leave home without us. ... Some of our lecturers also tend to drag us into their classes to introduce us. They tell their students that we are the most helpful people they should get to know but (jokingly) they have to remember to feed us from time to time." – Scott Orr, IUPUI.edu

Respect – it is earned, no?

- ☞ Many of us complain we don't get any respect from co–workers.
- ☞ Does the BOFH attitude help this?
- ☞ Can we do a better job of marketing ourselves?

Anecdote/Comment #2

Rusty Baughcum says:

☞ Management loves graphs. I wrote a Perl script that would graph out capacity planning stats on a weekly basis and emailed that to my boss...

☞ I also send in weekly status reports of major accomplishments/hardware problems

Take a Vacation

"I was working for a small company in Atlanta where I was the only Sysadmin. My boss thought he could pull my workload and his while I was on vacation. I believe he thought I was pulling his leg about how busy I was. After I returned from vacation, I found 4 days worth of unfinished backups queued up in the log with the system running at 90% CPU utilization, and everyone complaining about how slow it was. Needless to say, he didn't bother me so much after that." – Rusty Baughcum

Anecdote/Comment #3

Kevin Zimmerman from UC Berkeley says:

☞ The mass mailings sent out to announce or propose system outages are a real opportunity to educate your users, but it took me a long time to learn that not only do they go a lot further than you might think, more importantly they educate the management and executives tiers above you.

Is it status, or spam?

☞ Kevin's point about mass mailings brings up the important point of "enough, not too much."

☞ Do you send a status report to all of your users every time you bring a machine down? Do you warn them all about a desktop system?

☞ Do you warn them all about the database server?

☞ How often?

☞ What if it gets cancelled? Rescheduled?

Is marketing really a 9–letter word?

☞ "Marketing" has a very bad rep, especially among technically inclined people. We don't like thinking we are being manipulated.

☞ Marketing can be a Good Thing®, though, when used correctly. This isn't a case of the end justifying the means.

☞ Marketing can mean educating, not just selling something someone doesn't need.

Comment #4

"I would imagine that successful selling of sysadmins would involve speaking the language of the audience.

In the case of HR folks and/or hiring managers, how much money and/or time have you saved or would you save the company (or department) because of what you've done or regularly do and/or because of what you have stopped or do regularly stop from happening." – David Alban

Setting Reasonable Expectations

☞ How else can I keep my reputation as a miracle worker?

Observation #5

"My job is like an airline pilot's –– when I'm doing it well, you might not even notice me, but my mistakes are often quite spectacular" – unknown.

We've never had a security problem, why do you spend so much time on it?

☞ This is a direct quote... or as close to as I can remember, anyway.

Keeping the promises we make

- Problem tracking and deliverables.
  - Black hole or triage?
- Warning about changes
- Giving users a chance to give feedback

Karen Kern

☞ An expert at PR...

Dan Klein

☞ Runs many enterprises...

Strata Rose Chalup

☞ Experience counts...

Open for debate

Your turn.