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DECnet For Macintosh: Problem With Security Field (11/93)

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TOPIC -----

A customer was having problems with DECnet and a Quadra 800, running with PATHWORKS from Digital. I was unable to help him, and DEC was unwilling to. However, the customer seems to found his own answers, so I thought I would send them to you.

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I have found the problem that was causing the outgoing DECnet connections on PHAZER (Quadra 800) to timeout. This appears to be another software bug and while I am happy to get the PATHWORKS working again I am not very pleased with having lost more than a weeks worth of work on this issue. Please understand I appreciate your help with the series of problems I have had over the past several months, and I do not intent for you to be offended by my comments which follow. These are for the Digital, Apple and/or Thursby folks who allow buggy software to be released and, consequently, end up wasting both your and my time.

The problem is in the NCP Security sub-menu of the Executor Characteristics menu. The security "UserName" and "Password" is supposed to control access from remote systems into the Macintosh (that is incoming DECnet links) and should have nothing to do with connections from the Macintosh to a remote system (that is outgoing DECnet links). There seems to be at least three bugs associated with this "feature".

- 1) When the UserName and Password are filled in so that access to PHAZER is secure but possible the outgoing DECnet links timeout. When the UserName and Password are "blanked" so that there is uncontrolled, public access to PHAZER the outgoing DECnet works just fine. Finally, when the UserName is blank, but the Password is filled in so that access into PHAZER is impossible the outgoing DECnet works as well. Thus, it appears that somehow the UserName is being attached to the outgoing DECnet links and causing them to fail. There is no way to set up a secure yet accessible incoming link and have outgoing links work as well.

- 2) If the problem associated with 1 above is due to attaching the UserName with the outgoing links as some sort of "login" information, then the "timeout" error is incorrect. Instead the error should be something like "login info. invalid at remote node". It is possible that the outgoing link from PHAZER isn't even being attempted as I have been unsuccessful in identifying any NETSERVER.LOG files on the VAX that are associated with the failure. In this case, the error has nothing to do with the remote node and should not be reported as a timeout.
- 3) The displayed parameters in the Security sub-menu do not reflect the current status of the passwords. The same number of dots are always displayed regardless of the number of characters in the password and whether the password is blanked. This is a problem as one can not accurately determine the current status of the Security setup. In addition, the "Default" button does not appear to reset the parameters to default values. Rather it seems to reflect the function of an UnDo key and sets the parameters to the values when the sub-menu was first popped up. This button should be renamed so the button reflects the function or recoded so the name reflects the function.

All of these problems should have been obvious during initial testing. Especially, if this testing was done by someone who knows what the code is actually suppose to do. Perhaps I am assuming too much here.

I am mostly annoyed because the code is not functioning as described in the documentation (but then a little more than one page out of all of the PATHWORKS documents is not much to go on) and I wasted a considerable amount of effort in trying to isolate this problem. This effort has included installing PATHWORKS a multiple number of times, removing "third party" applications, reinstalling the OS several times, relocating the system on another network, replacing the Ethernet adapter, moving all applications off the disk, writing up extensive problem descriptions, reinitializing the PRAM, erasing the disk and reinstalling the software. I had even called up the hardware folks and was considering having the logic board replaced. Finally, I stumbled upon this bug quite by accident as I was basically reduced to randomly poking at the keyboard. It never occurred to me that such a simple functionality (that is security access TO the Macintosh) could be the cause of the problem and the error return was of no help.

I now have another work-around to add to my work-around that avoids the bad interaction between the Apple Color Printer and MacX. Now I must spend the time to configure the machine back to an operational state. All told I will probably lose two weeks of operational time and at least a solid man-week of my effort. This Quadra 800 is turning out to be a very expensive machine. At this point my questions include: How long will my work-around list grow?, How many more man-weeks of effort will I lose?, When will this machine become a reliable, operational tool? While I find a lot of advantages in using the Quadra, the problems I have had so far more than offset these and I find myself questioning the wisdom of this purchase.

I don't know what the solution to this problem is, and I don't know in

particular what you can do other than make sure my comments get forwarded on to the appropriate people. As I said earlier, I appreciate your help on these issues and, in fact, I know that your assistance and suggestions have greatly helped me minimize the extent of this catastrophe. Once again I thank you for your help.

DISCUSSION -----

Thanks for sharing the information. We just want to clarify a few things:

- 1) DECnet is developed by Thursby for Digital, and Apple has no part in the design or testing of the product.
- 2) This was a known problem with DECnet when you leave the username and/or password fields blanks. We called Digital support in Atlanta and they told us the workaround right away so we don't understand why he said DEC is unwilling to help him.
- 3) We tried it today on our Macintosh IIci running System 7.1, DECnet 1.2. We tested username and password blank, username blank and password filled, username filled and password blank and they all work fine. We were able to connect to our VAX using NetCopy. We suspect that the problem was fixed in DECnet 1.2 and if he has not upgraded, it's worth a try.

We will blind copy Digital on this response.
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