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Wow! Did they really do that?

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I once heard that the intelligence of any group of people is that of the person with the lowest IQ divided by the number of people involved. A recent case seems to be a supporting data point for this point of view.

Consider if you will the company [FTDI](#). This company is (was?) the world leader in the area of USB bridge chips that make it easy to add USB access to all sorts of gadgets that would otherwise be difficult, expensive, and problem prone. The FTDI chips work well and come with easy to use software distributed for free with Windows, Mac, Linux, and many other sorts of computers. The chips and the software drivers were so good that many customers chose to go with FTDI rather than other vendors. The result of this is that these chips are expensive and often hard to find.

So FTDI gets to laugh all the way to the bank and otherwise all is well right? Well not quite. Counterfeits! With the real McCoy so hard to get, many legitimate vendors were tricked into buying fake chips. Do these fakes work? Mostly, it's not as if the USB bridging function is *that* hard to do. FTDI however was not amused. They were losing some sales and lots of that delicious money! They had to do something and they did!

To stem the loss of revenue, a new software driver was released that detects some subtle difference between genuine and fake chips and then erases a vital data entry called the PID (Product ID) if a fake is detected. After that, the fake chip and the product it was embedded in will no longer function. The consumer is now the proud owner of a new paper weight or brick as it is sometimes called. The new driver was released through the Microsoft Windows update mechanism where it was incorporated into countless millions of computers all around the world.

So; Is this a nasty thing to do? Consider this bit on computer trespass (my emphasis):

*In Virginia, computer trespass consists of, with malicious intent, copying, altering, or **erasing data** from a computer, **causing a computer to malfunction**, causing an electronic funds transfer, etc.*[\[Wikipedia\]](#)

Yes this IS a very nasty thing to do! It hurts consumers at random. Some have gone so far as to label it cyber-terrorism! While I am not sure about that, one thing is certain, this action has caused serious, if not fatal, damage to the faith and value of the FTDI brand. Engineers chose and specified FTDI chips over others because they were trusted, reliable and dependable. That perception is gone and it will be very difficult to recover that goodwill.

I cannot even begin to imagine the legal fall-out from what would happen if a large number of products suddenly stopped working and the victim decided to let loose the dogs (lawyers) of war in revenge!

I am a big fan of the EEVBLOG and this posting does a good job of summarizing people's feelings about this issue and the lameness of the company's responses:

[EEVblog #676 – RANT: FTDI Bricking Counterfeit Chips!](#)

As for me, I am looking for other vendors. This sort behaviour is so unacceptable that it makes me seriously wonder what kind of crazy people are in charge at FTDI.

What do you think? I'd really like to hear what you think about this issue!

Best regards;

Peter Camilleri (aka Squidly Jones)

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