Repair, re-use, renew, adapt, survive

30/11/2020

It is more than a year since I had to reinstall my operating system on my sturdy MacBook Pro (2015 8gb RAM 128gb SSD, OS X Yosemite 10.10.5). Everything still works great, and I celebrate my own sheer bloodymindedness plus *desperate need* to achieve this. Well done me.

I was just about to leave for London, ready to teach the academic year at my old employer university. I anticipated being away for at least 3 months, with only my MBPro to support all my technical needs, both work and home life. Staying in a modest small room with a family I didn't know but had been recommended to by someone I did, I knew that living space was at a premium. No big screens or other units then, just take the laptop. I'd done this before with the same or similar laptops, it was always fine.

About a week before my flight was due, my laptop refused to start up. This had never happened to me before with any Macbook. Startup would not complete, it would get a third way in, then just stalled and turned off again. Oh dear. Terror filled me. What was I going to do?! I called our local 'genius bar' on the island. They are a good team and know their stuff, but the wait time is usually at least a week. As I spoke to the woman I realised I just didn't have time to wait that long. Oh dear. More terror. That feeling of cold sweat, itchy palms and restlessness. No idea how to solve this major problem.

I did what all tech heads do: I began to google. First, to find out how to get error messages displayed. Then, take photos of the screen as quick as possible before the unit terminated itself again. Then, how to start in safe and recovery mode. I also tested my bootable backup drive, which worked and was a total relief. Then, a lot of googling about the messages themselves, tracing the problem to being very likely a corrupted certified software installations log file. A lot of people seem to have very similar problems, so there were a lot of different solutions to read through and 'critically assess' for usefulness. Critical analysis was paramount.

I then realised that the only option was to replace the whole OS, but then I discovered my hard drive (SSD 128gb) was too full for this to be possible (to download the new OS, and space for the crunching I thought). So I looked at my backup drive again on my other mac (Mac Mini 2012) to find out what I could safely delete. I could delete a folder of stuff that was 20GB. I went back to the broken MBPro and had to launch command line (terminal) access so I could delete the folder, there was no other way. More googling. My basic yet at least existing command line skills came into their own, and I was able to delete the unnecessary folder easily. After that it felt like plain sailing to go back into safe and get the fresh copy of OS X 10.10.5 from the Apple download site, and then install it, which was all pretty easy after what Id gone through.

When I finally came to try and start the laptop normally, and that little line just sped through to complete, launching the login screen, I nearly cried. Every time I start the unit my hand shakes just a little, and I send a little prayer again to all the gods old and new that it won't stall. It doesn't. It works. It keeps working. I hope writing this post doesn't jinx it.

The moral of the story is that there will come a time in your life, one point, when you cannot rely on someone else's tech skills, repair skills, error tracing skills. You will have to do it. So, learn to do it.

Link to the search history pages I checked on 24th September 2019:
https://tab.bz/yosemite_rescue

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