

Re: Giving an application a window icon in a sensible way

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Source: <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/Java/comp.lang.java.programmer/2006-11/msg03452.html>

- *From:* nebulous99@xxxxxxxxxx
 - *Date:* 26 Nov 2006 23:05:16 -0800
-

Bent C Dalager wrote:

In article <1164532424.537227.125330@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, <nebulous99@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Bent C Dalager wrote:

As for game theory, if that is what you are trying to apply here then it seems to me you are entirely ignoring the shadow of the future in your analysis, and you may be stuck in a trivial model where you think there are only two distinct players in the game.

(Explanation)

Very well, then, it seems that [snip insult]

- 1) It completely disregards the shadow of the future.

If you'd care to speak English, I might be able to debate you further on this matter. If you refuse to, then I will have to just blanket disclaim whatever negative things about me you are saying or implying and have done with it.

But an attempt to parse what you might be meaning suggests that you've made a significant error. Far from ignoring the future, I'm concerned with it. If I didn't care about the future I wouldn't care about the fact that someone had claimed negative things about me in public. But thinking about the chain of consequences if they do so unopposed leads me to act differently. Consider a person who hears the insult, but does not hear anything that provides a counterbalancing viewpoint -- for example, a hostile claim about my IQ with no corresponding positive claim, nor any pointing out of a flaw in the argument used to "prove"

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my supposed low IQ. True, this person might discover the flaw on their own, or simply be skeptical. On the other hand, they might be credulous, and their belief in my inferiority will then influence how they treat me in the future.

Now consider the potential scope of the internet, and multiply that one person by, oh, say, 6 billion or so...

Fortunately, the very people most influenced by these insults, the credulous, are equally susceptible to be influenced in *both* directions, from which it isn't difficult to conclude how to prevent the nightmare scenario of some jerk online convincing the world to have nothing to do with me (or worse, to actively abuse me). And that method is simple: for each insult, there must be an equal and opposite rebuttal. The two influences will exactly cancel. Some people are credulous, and they will swing widely both ways before settling at the center again. Others are less susceptible to persuasion, and may budge slightly or stay put.

Of course, this is with regard to claims that are false, or that are matters of opinion with no real empirical basis at all. Unfortunately, if someone were to discover a true but unpleasant claim about me and start broadcasting it, I don't see any recourse other than to forcibly shut them up (assuming they marshaled something resembling actual evidence to support their claim). On the other hand, that has fortunately not actually happened yet, and there may not be any such claim anyway. Maybe the real worst-case is that such a claim is found that, while false, is in some ways particularly convincing anyway, in much the way it can be difficult to persuade a tribal people that the earth isn't flat because the alternative is counter to their intuition and they are unequipped to understand the evidence against its flatness. Physically escorting them up to orbit and back would likely be necessary, but that is rather expensive. I hope that a similarly false-but-plausible-sounding hostile notion regarding me doesn't crop up, the disproving of which might be similarly involved or expensive...

More generally, this seems to indicate a possibly serious problem with the mere existence of the Internet, for all its benefits. I'm not a luddite by any means, but this one particular area is a recurring concern -- it seems to be possible for any kind of libel, slander, or mudslinging directed against an individual to be broadcast unreasonably and undeservedly far and wide now, impossible to recall it (and so to force its recall using e.g. legal action to obtain a court injunction), and difficult to counter it in any other way than by a corresponding broadcast of the negation of what was claimed (in the simplest case, "what the preceding message said is false", but producing arguments and evidence against it is surely more effective). And of course every opinion anyone has ever expressed about anyone else is now susceptible to a Google search...there seem to be only two defenses. Besides the counteropinion defense, there's the nymshifting defense -- everyone could create a new pseudonymous identity for every separate online

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interaction, for example one for each separate question or conversation in comp.lang.java.programmer. This strikes me as a lot of work, until our communication tools make establishing new pseudonyms easy and automatic. Also, it needs to be harder to tie together anyone's pseudonyms. Much harder. As a rule, the originating IP address of every posting tends to be viewable by everybody else (not just those at providers who deal with abuse complaints), so we're at minimum talking about automating something equivalent to a) setting up a new GG account for every new thread a person participates in, or at least for every newsgroup or equivalent context, and b) Tor-routing everything transparently with a minimum of fuss. As far as I can tell, the bare *minimum* to avoid the rebuttal-requirement scenario is Tor-routing combined with the creation of a new GG account after each insult, thereby effectively erasing it from history.

And it is obviously critically important that none of those identities ever be traceable to your name offline, lest you have to actually have your name legally changed just to escape an undeserved reputation created by some loser on the Internet with too much free time. The last time I checked, that is not only a massive inconvenience, it actually *costs money* too...and that means that a penetration enables anyone who wants to to cost you money at any time, at the push of a button. In actual fact, it's even worse; at least when past insults that are believed accumulate to the point of interfering with activities like job-finding or getting loans, the victim will have to change their name legally, relocate, find a new job, and about six thousand other things. To top it off, so will their whole family, and most of their friends will have to fall by the wayside, leaving only those who can definitely be trusted with the ability to connect the old and new identities! The estimated expense of all this is upwards of \$6000, *if* an online problem develops into a problem of large enough magnitude. And this can potentially be caused at any time by anyone who simply decides they have a beef with you... I don't see any solution other than strong online pseudonymity to preventing anyone from being able to cost anyone else \$6000 and months of inconvenience at the drop of a hat. It should be noted that in less affluent countries and in the US with its hole-riddled safety net, the consequences can even be death by starvation or exposure, if someone starts spreading internet rumours and nonsense that gets you fired, gets you unhireable, and thus you don't eat ever again. The only insurance would be to sock a few tens of thousands away as an emergency relocation-and-name-change fund, which you might not have saved up yet by the time the bomb gets dropped...

If anything, there's worse. After all, people offline will know your legal name and place of business and things like that. If one of *those* decides to ruin you with online rumour-spreading, then to put things bluntly, you're fucked even if you *do* use strong pseudonymity. So the internet may well force us to limit our offline transactions to only that which we can't do online. Human social interaction becomes a largely online-only affair, and offline is limited to highly ritualized formal transactions that can't be done online and in which everyone is

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nervous and walking on eggshells because any other participant that gets a mind to can blow their whole life sky-high. It's nearly as bad as a Wild West type setting where everyone packs a gun and there's very little accountability regarding their use of it. At least you can start over after the attacks depicted in this scenario, unlike after getting fatally shot. On the flip side, it's easy to set up justice systems to catch and punish the majority of people who wantonly shoot people, and in the process prevent by deterrence a lot of the same. There's also the mutually assured destruction factor that you might *be* shot when you pull the gun, if your target is a quicker draw. Whereas the same strong pseudonymity necessary to enable someone to quickly amputate an online "limb" that becomes "gangrenous" before it threatens the whole organism also enables someone who penetrates your real name to attack it online untraceably. There's no hope for justice and no MAD threat when the victim can't identify who nuked him to target their own missiles and the police also can't identify the perp. And that means there's no deterrence.

I can't see any solutions to the final dilemma at all. On the one hand, we could try to somehow *prevent* strong pseudonymity, but this opens up a Pandora's box of surveillance, police state behavior, chilling of speech, and so forth, and doesn't stop someone "nuking" someone else with strongly negative belief-spreading about them. It only ensures the MAD option and possibly enables some kind of legal action, which is cold comfort since in that world you also can't change your identity and start over after being nuked.

On the other hand, we could push a magic button and make everyone in the world disregard anything bad they hear (however plausible) about anyone else over the internet, and while we're at it make gullibility itself a crime, banish war and poverty, and institute peace on earth by fiat. I can tell you, though, that I already tried one of those miraculous easy buttons from Staples and it definitely didn't perform as advertised, so that option seems to be right out. ;)

Where does that leave us? We can't make everyone else not be gullible, and we can't make everyone else like us or even just not say nasty things about us on the net. We can only respond with a change of identity if our current one ends up in undeserved disrepute (and enabling that, mind you, enables people to get rid of identities in *deserved* disrepute too...)

If you have any brilliant suggestions, I'd like to hear them. Currently, my two rays of hope here are things like Tor and Freenet, on the one hand, and (paradoxically) the proliferation of surveillance on the other. The latter may *force* society to become really, really tolerant in a big hurry once it reaches the knee of the curve, and that will take the potentially serious consequences out of the equation, and reduce insults again to what they once were before the Internet: something you could just shrug off with impunity.

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