

California Computer Care

News,
Views,
Tips and
Cool Techniques
for CCC Members

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We
speak
Geek,
so you
don't
have to.

Dumb, Dumb, Dumb

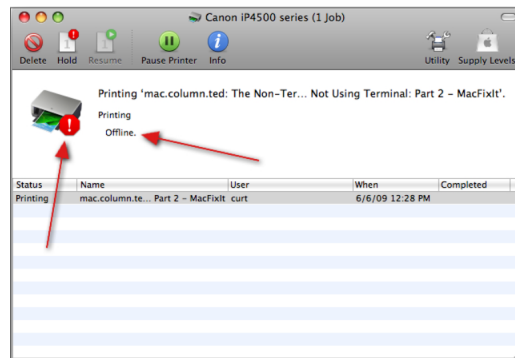
How dumb can you get? A true story.

So, I'm doing my accounts payable. Pile up the bills, review the Visa statement. Glance at the phone bills (can anybody make sense of those darn things?). Take their word for it. Go through the rest, ouch! Enter all of the necessary info into *Quicken* and print out the checks. Stuff the checks into their respective envelopes, stick on the postage stamps; done. Its enough to give me a little leg cramp, but a quick flex and it passes.

Time to review the day's technology news.

Several web sites later, I come across an article that I want to print. I choose Print from *Safari's* File menu and click the Print button. A few seconds pass as I read the next news story and then I notice my printer's icon jumping madly about in the Dock. A quick click on the peripatetic icon and I am greeted by this cheery message:

Printing Offline.



My print queue window showing the error message.

I notice the little exclamation point, in the red disk, next to the printer's icon. It appears in the *Printer Queue* window and on the printer's Dock icon. I know that exclamation point very well. It means that Mac and the printer aren't talking.

Well, pooh!

When Mac and printer won't talk there are three usual suspects: corrupted print center settings, corrupted printer software and disconnected printer cable.

Troubleshooting begins...

So, this is what I live for. Wait, that's not quite right. I live to do this for you. *I don't want to have to do it for me!*

The lure of the exotic...

OK, let's get started. One of Mac OS X's most complicated and mysterious systems is the *Print Center*. Over the years, as Mac OS X has matured, the *Print Center* has become more reliable and less visible to us users. Once there was a *Print Center* utility to help fix *Print Center* problems, but no more. Now, you can only access the most basic functions of the *Print Center*. You do so by using the *Print & Fax System Preference*. This is all quite exotic and mysterious ground, so naturally, I thought of it first.

Opening *Print & Fax* showed my printer installed as usual. *Obviously* (oops!), the *Print Center* is at fault. So, I delete my printer from the *Printer List* and then click the Plus (+) button to add it back in.

But, its not there to add.

Next step...

Mac and printer really aren't talking, are they? My printer automatically turns itself off after a few minutes of idle time and there has been enough time since I printed the checks for it to do so. I turn it on. The printer does its little turn on dance and is ready. I check the *Printer List* and it still isn't there to add.

Alright, it must be a cable problem. I unplug the USB cable and plug it in again. Nothing. I change to a new USB cable (a fancy one with lights in it that tell you if it is working or not), still no printer.

OK, must be a problem with the USB monitoring software, right? A restart of Mac usually solves this as it forces Mac to examine and reconnect to the USB bus that controls all USB connections. Still nothing!

Reset...

Resetting everything now sounds like a good plan. You can force a reset and memory purge by turning off everything and letting your equipment sit, unpowered for ten minutes or so. It would be nice if I could do this to me occasionally, but alas.

I shut down Mac, turn off the printer and walk away for awhile.

Returning, I start up the printer and boot Mac. Up they come, nice as can be. I open *System Preferences*, click on *Print & Fax*, click the Plus button and, no printer. Oh, pooh, again!

The dive...

Well, its time to do my least favorite thing, dive under my desk and sort out the hideous spaghetti of cables. There, a messy mass of power cords, UPS, four surge protectors, USB, Firewire, network, coaxial and telephone cables defies me to trace their paths to and fro. With my flashlight in my teeth, I begin to inspect the tangled mess.

The villain discovered...

And, there it is, an unplugged power brick. But, what does it power? I trace the cord up, up, up and what does it connect to? One of my two, stacked one upon the other, USB hubs.

A USB hub is a box that connects to your Mac to give it more USB ports than Apple built in. My iMac has four USB ports, but I have twelve USB devices to plug in. Hence, two hubs.

You may not see this as a dumb thing.

That's kind of you. But, what you may not know is that the now unpowered USB hub, when powered, lights up like a Christmas tree with red, blue and white lights of eye squinting brightness. And, I didn't notice. I placed the hubs where I couldn't miss seeing them, all of the time, and I didn't notice. Instead I chased interesting, exotic problems and ignored the most obvious possibility:

*Something is unplugged!**

Dr. Dean Edell says, "When you hear hoof beats think horses, not zebras." I forgot that simple admonition. This was a good reminder. Hope it sticks.

I tell this story on myself to remind you to first check the obvious. If a device doesn't work, make sure that its cables are connected, see if lights are on that should be on, look for flashing red

* Yeah, I kicked it loose when I stretched my cramping leg. I even felt myself kick something, but it didn't register.

lights (always a bad thing), do a restart (couldn't hurt) or a shut down and boot again. Then tackle the weird stuff. Or, call me I love weird!

June Tip —

Macs no longer have telephone modems built-in. Telephone modems were used in ancient times to connect your Mac directly to the phone system for excruciatingly slow internet connections. So few people still connect that way that Apple stopped putting modems into Macs about four years ago (and almost nobody noticed).

But, telephone modems do still have uses. With a telephone modem your Mac can send and receive faxes. Telephone modems are also useful if your DSL or cable connection is down for repairs. A slow connection is sometimes better than no connection. And, folks with portable Macs may find themselves in places where DSL and cable connections are unheard of. A telephone modem may be your only choice to stay connected.

So, if you need a telephone modem for your Mac, get Apple's tiny USB modem adapter. It's available from Amazon.com for \$49.99 and works great:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B000C6TLDO/?tag=calicompcare-20>

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