

OFFICIAL STATEMENT

From: Dr. Michael Carper, WA9PIE, Owner/Partner, HRD Software, LLC
Date: 19-December, 2016
Subject: Recent customer service issue

There are three areas of concern within this event - blacklisting, retaliation, and software license management (referred to as a "virus"). Here's a breakdown of this event in these three areas:

Blacklisting

On the notion of "blacklisting"... I suppose this has to do with a concept where a customer posts a bad review somewhere about a company and the company retaliates by (a) removing the negative post and (b) eliminating their ability to post negative reviews in the future. If you can agree with this definition, let me continue...

HRD does not own, operate, or manage systems like QRZ forums, eham forums, Reddit... and so on. So literally, we don't have the ability to do (a) or (b) above. I'm aware that those who manage QRZ or eham have - in extreme cases - removed forum threads when they determine that the thread has gotten out-of-hand. But we have never done this because we're unable to. If that makes sense, I'll continue...

Retaliation

I have learned that - in at least one case - one of our contract support employees used the term "blacklist" in-writing in a support ticket. Further, they referenced a negative online review as the cause for being blocked from contacting our tech support. I've dealt with that behavior. In particular, I've made it clear that - given that we are unable to do (a) or (b) from above, that "blacklisting" is not something we can do. I've also made our policy clear that we do not retaliate against current or prospective customers for posting negative reviews. This does not reflect the policies or procedures of our company. But it was said. It was a mistake.

Otherwise, all we would have is a really upset customer (and I would want to be his advocate). And as the case occurred, someone wrongfully made a decision to "block that customer from contacting support." They incorrectly referred to this as "blacklisting." And they did not offer the customer a refund. Again, this was a mistake.

Software License Management

With regards to this "virus"... you can hardly refer to software license management as a virus. This practice is very common among software makers from Microsoft... to Symantec... and many many more. It is not inappropriate or unethical to disable software license keys under the appropriate circumstances. In particular, when a customer has been given a refund for the purchase of a given software license, it's appropriate to disable the related software license keys. The problem I have with this situation is that the keys were disabled without getting approval to issue a refund.

Evaluating this event as a whole

I'm sure we've both seen signs outside of places of business that said something like, "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone." (I Googled that and found tons of references and pictures of these signs.)

If you ran a business and a customer became abusive... would it be appropriate for you to "refuse service"? Have you ever heard of people being "barred" from entering a place of business? [For the record, I'm not characterizing any current, past, or prospective customers I've encountered as "abusive." I'm just simply drawing a distinction between preventing people from expressing their opinions on a public forum and a business deciding to discontinue doing business with a given customer... to which I'm not a fan of either.]

Well, we don't refer to this as "blacklisting". Just because a business decides to "refuse service" (for whatever reason) is not retaliation... and it does not prevent their voices from being heard and posting all the gory details of their experience. But under no circumstances is it our policy or practice to bar someone from our technical support because they have posted a negative review. As it's obviously happened here, it was a mistake. I've taken action that I believe will prevent this from ever happening again.

As a practice, we do request that customers install the latest software version when contacting support. This is a common practice within software support, given that half the reason for releasing new versions of software is to eliminate software defects that have been previously reported. In this case, the software license manager within the software was updated with the installation of the upgrade. Given that the license key was later disabled, the software would not run.

We have re-enabled that license key. I have offered to discuss this event with the customer directly in an effort to offer additional remedies.

If this all makes sense, what should have happened... and what will happen in the future is the following:

If we cannot resolve a customer's technical issues to their satisfaction, we can offer them a refund (or they can request it). The support staff will need to get approval for this from one of the owners. Upon approval, the original purchase price will be refunded and the license key will be deactivated. At that point, the customer is free to use another product.

While I'm not a big fan of the idea (and it should be rare), I suppose we should reserve the right to refuse service to customers or prospective customers under certain extreme circumstances... again, with proper approval. But this will not happen in retaliation.

But after looking at this event over the past few days, I know that mistakes were made. We apologize. Our future performance will judge how effectively we have dealt with this.