# 10 habits of superstitious users

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Created *24/08/2009 - 11:17pm*
Submitted by srlinuxx on Monday 24th of August 2009 11:17:01 PM Filed under Misc [1]

In 1947, the psychologist B. F. Skinner reported a series of experiments in which pigeons could push a lever that would randomly either give them a food pellet, or nothing. Think of it as a sort of one-armed bandit that the pigeons played for free. Skinner found, after a while, that some of the pigeons started acting oddly before pushing the lever. One moved in counterclockwise circles, one repeatedly stuck its head into the upper corner of the cage, and two others would swing their heads back and forth in a sort of pendulum motion. He suggested that the birds had developed ?superstitious behaviors? by associating getting the food with something they happened to be doing when they actually got it ? and they had wrongly concluded that if they did it again, they were more likely to get the pellet. Essentially, they were doing a sort of food-pellet dance to better their odds.

Although computer users are undoubtedly smarter than pigeons, users who really don?t understand how a computer works may also wrongly connect some action of theirs with success (and repeat it), or associate it with failure (and avoid it like the plague). Here are some of the user superstitions I?ve encountered.

1: Refusing to reboot

Some users seem to regard a computer that?s up and running and doing what they want as a sort of miracle, achieved against all odds, and unlikely ever to be repeated ? certainly not by them. Reboot? Not on your life! If it ain?t broke, don?t fix it. Why take the risk?

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