

Custom-printing your own attendee pass to the Windows 95 launch

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I attended a good-bye event for one of the classic Microsoft Redmond campus buildings, and I learned from one of the attendees of the farewell event that he and a few others crashed the Windows 95 launch event.

One of the longest-tenured Windows developers left the Windows 95 team several months before the project was completed. His departure was too far in the past to qualify for a Ship-It award or for being invited to stand on the bleachers behind the stage with the rest of the product team.

That developer was a bit displeased that he wasn't invited to the launch event, so he decided to sneak in uninvited.

And since his new project dealt with professional high quality printing, he decided that if the team wouldn't give him a pass, he would simply forge one.

His new team resided in Building 8, which overlooked the field where the launch event was being set up. They noticed that the work crews had a yellow badge which granted them access to the fenced-off area, so they created a replica and tried it out.

The badge easily fooled the guard.

Once inside, they explored the area and saw Microsoft employees with yellow *Staff* badges. It took a little more work to replicate those, but they succeeded. They also discovered that the backstage passes followed the same design as the yellow crew passes, just in a different color. So they made forgeries of those passes, too.¹

Two nights before the launch event, they got to see what the official attendee badges looked like, and since they were very similar to the yellow *Staff* badges, they were able to create fakes of those as well.

The night before the event, they discovered that you also needed a ticket to get in. They were able to design a replica, but they didn't have good card stock for the fake tickets, and their forgeries were unconvincing. Their plan appeared to be doomed!

On the morning of the event, one of the co-conspirators brought in a walkie-talkie that was able to tune into the frequency used by the event staff. They heard somebody say, "I have a guest at the gate who doesn't have their ticket, but their nametag has a gold star on it."

And the reply was, "That's okay. The gold star means they are a VIP guest. Let them in."

They managed to find some gold stars and affixed them to their forged badges. Boom, they can now get into the event.

Once inside, they put on their yellow *Staff* badges and walked around with their walkie-talkies. The walkie-talkies served two purposes: First, it gave them access to additional information that could be useful in their social engineering efforts. And second, "It is unbelievable how official you look with walkie-talkies."

As show time approached, they switched to their attendee badges, walked into the tent, and found great seats.

The forgeries didn't stop there. When they learned that there was a special event in the main tent that evening, they were able to forge tickets to that event, too.

Afterward, their department head told them he could have easily gotten them tickets to the Windows 95 launch if they had only asked. But it wouldn't have been anywhere near as fun as sneaking in!

¹ It turns out that they never pulled out their backstage passes. The other badges gave them all the access they needed.

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