

The Magical Excel 97 Far East Language Build Screwdriver™

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The cluster of Microsoft buildings 16 through 18 were the home of the Microsoft Office team for many, many years. When they moved to Building 7 Building 37, all of the machines in the old build lab were powered down and moved to the new build lab in Building 37.

Office 97 was at this time already a very old product, so its build machines would need to be used only to service a critical security hotfix. Consequently, those machines were moved to the new build lab, but with the expectation that they would never need to be powered on.

They almost made it to the end of the support lifecycle, but alas, a security issue was identified that affected multiple versions of Microsoft Office, including Office 97, so the build machines needed to be fired up and put through their paces, for what the team hoped to be one final hurrah.

The security lead for Microsoft Office knew the drill. She sent out the usual email to the affected teams, laid out the schedule, and the team went through the standard process: Developers identified the root cause of the problem and came up with a minimally-invasive fix with the lowest risk of regression, and test plans were developed to validate the fix on all supported platforms, while focusing on areas most likely to be affected by a possible regression. Documentation teams worked with the MSRC team to draft the security bulletin, stage the Web pages, and prepare answers to questions they were likely to receive from customers. The build teams prepared the machines in the build lab to produce all the necessary product builds, across all languages, processor architectures, and product packages, including both retail versions and developer editions. All the usual stuff that happens. This wasn't their first rodeo.

The security lead got a call from the build lab. "We may not be able to produce an update for Excel 97 Far East languages."

"Do you need some more time?" she asked.

“No, it’s not a matter of time. It may simply never happen. We’re still working on it, though. I’ll get back to you.”

The security lead tried not to panic. What was she going to tell MSRC?

The build lab called back. “We think it’s working now. Fingers crossed.”

She asked, “Okay, can you please tell me what’s going on exactly?”

They explained, “When we moved out of the old build lab, the build machines were shut down for the first time in a very long time, and this was the first time we needed to power the Excel 97 Far East build machine back on. When we tried to turn it on, it started to boot up, but then the power button popped back out and it turned off. We couldn’t get the machine to turn on and *stay on*. And of course these machines are so old, they are themselves out of support from the manufacturer, and we weren’t sure sure how long it would take to rebuild the entire build environment on another system and make sure we did it correctly. This is a really old system, and it’s hard for people to remember exactly how to set it up again.”

“But you got it working?” she asked.

“Yeah, we figured out how to get it to boot up. We jammed a screwdriver in the power button. Seems to be working so far. Knock on wood.”

And thus was born a new inside joke: The Magical Excel 97 Far East Language Build Screwdriver™.

Whenever somebody was having trouble with a build, she would ask, “Do you need me to go get the Magical Excel 97 FE build screwdriver to see if that helps?”

Office 97 released on this day in 1996. Magical screwdriver not included.

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