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A Network Fable: For The Right Reasons

By Ethan Banks

Alex's phone blew up. Text. Text. Another text. The vibrator buzzed like a shock treatment. What now? He glanced at the screen in the dashboard. CarPlay showed the cursed red dot over the green and white text icon. He sighed.

"Siri, read me my new messages."

"Cameron My Annoying Boss says..."

Siri robotically intoned Cameron's latest diatribe, most of which had to do with Alex clearing his calendar Monday afternoon to attend a meeting with a vendor coming in to make a surprise presentation. At least, it was a surprise to Alex.

Jenny, Alex's wife, crossed her arms in the passenger seat. "Why can't he leave us alone for one night? I haven't seen you in months. One Saturday night we finally get the kids sorted and go out, and that guy is pounding on your phone. I know ConFins pays good, but I hate that place."

Jenny was right. Since taking the Senior Network Architect position for Consolidated Financial Services years ago, Alex felt as if he'd parachuted into the middle of a burning trailer park. Cameron, CTO, was a whirlwind stoking flames and strewing wreckage. Cameron, Chief Tornado Officer.

Cameron never stopped. Calls on Christmas. Texts at night and on weekends. Cameron was bucking for COO, and planned to put IT, operations, and marketing under his control. Every chance he had to push his personal agenda, he took.

Alex was Cameron's shining star. Alex didn't just make lemonade from Cameron's lemons; he made a delicate, multi-layered lemon cake with perfect icing and exquisite decorations. Cameron leaned heavily on Alex to make Cameron's terrible decisions palatable.

That Monday, Alex found himself in a conference room staring at boxed lunches on an end table. He had no appetite; Jenny had gone quiet for the rest of the weekend, and a quiet Jenny was an upset Jenny. Alex mulled this over as others filed in.

Tony from the storage team arrived, followed by Reyna, devops team lead. And then virtualization master Big Bob showed up.

"Interesting," Alex thought. "We're all here."

"Any of you guys know what's up?" Big Bob asked, grabbing a box lunch and opening a bag of chips. No one did. The meeting was a surprise to everyone.

They waited a bit before Cameron walked in, just behind a neatly dressed woman in a business suit.

"Team, this is Celeste. She's the regional rep for Clouderatel, and I asked her here to present an opportunity that I think is gonna be great for us. This hybrid cloud thing is finally gonna happen for ConFins. It's gonna make us more agile and save us a bundle."

Celeste smiled at the team before launching into a PowerPoint deck.

“Oh hell,” Alex muttered. Cameron had latched onto this idea three months back, and like a bulldog he wouldn’t let go, despite all the issues Alex and his team had raised: an amorphous business case, fuzzy cost modeling, and a heap of technical tradeoffs. It was flat out the wrong decision, but Alex worried that if he called out his CTO, it might cost him his job.

The last time Cameron’s hard head had resulted in an ill-informed purchase, Alex found himself in charge of a two million dollar nightmare. The product Cameron had foisted on Alex didn’t fit ConFins needs, the hitless upgrade feature was an utter fantasy, and two years later there were still tickets open about the data loss problem.

Somehow, through bloody effort and sixty-hour weeks, Alex had made it work. But it cost him. Towards the end of that project, Jenny had threatened to leave Alex.

He replayed those dark months in his mind as presentation slides flickered on the display: marriage counseling, divorce lawyer research, and emotional turbulence. In the end, the kids had kept them together.

The problem came down to money. ConFins paid well. Very well. Finding a job that would replace that income would be tough. The job kept Alex away rather a lot, but Alex always felt it was temporary. His plan was to skill up to be worth even better money, find a recruiter, and leave ConFins behind.

But Cameron’s political ambition kept Alex so busy that skilling up was not possible. When was the last time he’d been to a training class? To a technical conference? To the local NOG that he’d help start? Cameron denied all the requests, always citing the latest project as a reason to keep Alex grounded.

“Alex? Alex, do you have any input here?” Cameron looked at him from across the conference room. Alex hadn’t been paying much attention to the presentation, not that it mattered. Based on the furrow of Cameron’s brow, the deal was done. He’d be surprised if Celeste didn’t already have a signed purchase order.

Before responding, Alex glanced at Reyna, Tony, and Big Bob. They looked shell-shocked. They knew what was coming; more havoc wreaked by the Chief Tornado Officer.

“No, Cameron. If this is the direction you want to take, go for it. I’ll do what I need to do.”

And this time Alex really would. It was time to go. And not for the money. For Jenny. For himself.

Virtual Design Clinic 2: The VDC Strikes Back

Join the Packet Pushers and guest speakers for [Virtual Design Clinic 2](#) on October 11, 2018.

This live, free, online event is a half-day mini-conference you can attend without a plane ticket, hotel room, or bad coffee and stale pastries (unless you bring your own bad coffee and stale pastries, in which case that's on you).

Virtual Design Clinic 2 features technical presentations including:

- Using Puppet For Network Automation
- Understanding ASICs And Switch Internals

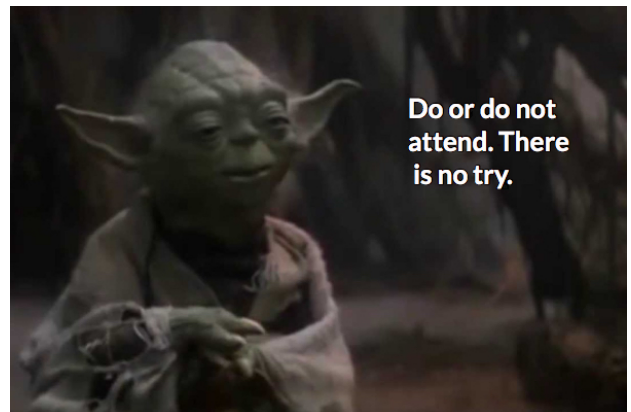
Plus, you can participate live in an AMA session with the Packet Pushers and guest panelists.

- Virtual Design Clinic 2
- October 11, 2018
- 11:00 am to 3:00 pm Eastern US timezone

[Register here](#) and we'll see you in the cybers.

If you can't make all the presentations on October 11, we'll post them to our membership site, [Ignition](#), which you can join for free.

And mark your calendar for a Holiday Change Freeze VDC coming December 19th!



Google's Censor-Friendly Search App Isn't Just Evil. It's Risky For Business

By Drew Conry-Murray

This August, investigative Web site The Intercept published a [story saying Google was developing a censor-friendly search app](#) for the Chinese market, code-named Dragonfly.

According to the story, the app would block search terms such as 'Human rights' and 'Tianamen Square' and filter out Web sites forbidden by the Chinese government.

In September, The Intercept [followed up with a story](#) claiming the app would tie a user's phone number to search queries, presumably making it easier for government authorities to identify and track—or track down—users.

According to news reports, Google says it is "[not close](#)" to releasing a search product in China. If it did, it would be a sharp turnabout for a company that put "Don't be evil" into its [2004 IPO prospectus](#).

I think Google would be morally wrong to cooperate with an authoritarian government by releasing a censorship-friendly product in China. But even if you set aside moral violations, Project Dragonfly also presents business risks for Google. Here's why.

1. Google Will Have A Harder Time Attracting And Retaining Talent

Tech giants compete fiercely to attract, and keep, talented developers and engineers. And the competition is increasing in a tight labor market; [Bloomberg notes](#) the unemployment rate for software engineers was 1.9% in 2017.

This environment gives tech workers more freedom to find another employer if they are dissatisfied, whether that be over salary, working conditions, or a workplace that doesn't match their values.

Speaking of values, a typical recruitment ploy of tech companies is to emphasize that workers aren't just drawing a paycheck—they're making a positive difference in the world. However specious this claim might be, it's much harder to make if the company is customizing a product to meet the draconian censorship requirements of an oppressive regime.

Google is already feeling consequences on the employment front. [Buzzfeed reports](#) that seven people have resigned from Google over the Dragonfly project. Earlier this year, [another dozen left Google](#) over the company's involvement in the development of AI technology for military drones.

And even if employees don't leave, they can express their dissatisfaction in other ways: publicly speaking out against the company or projects, leaking sensitive information to the media, or organizing other employees to protest a company's decision, exacerbating internal strife and discontent.

These actions may not drive a company out of business, but they do hobble an organization's ability to attract the best people. This problem may be particularly acute for companies like Google that are anxious to attract people with skills in high-demand fields such as analytics, data science, and AI.

2. Google May Erode User Trust

Consumers are becoming more wary of tech giants as they begin to understand the degree to which these companies can manipulate what users see, and the reams of data they collect.

For instance, [a recent Pew survey](#) charted a significant drop in user engagement on Facebook, which is a key metric that affects the company's advertising revenue. According to the survey, 42% of respondents have taken a break from the site for at least several weeks, and 26% deleted the app from their phones.

While Google has fared better in the public eye than popular social media platforms, the company recognizes that consumer trust is essential to the company's bottom line.

For example, search and email, two of Google's core products, often deal with sensitive or highly personal information. And as far back as the company's 2004

prospectus, it recognized the potential for harm if users believed they couldn't trust Google. The company wrote:

"...people have raised privacy concerns relating to the ability of our recently announced Gmail email service to match relevant ads to the content of email messages. Some people have also reacted negatively to the fact that our search technology can be used to help people find hateful or derogatory information on the web. Aspects of our future products may raise similar public concerns. Publicity regarding such concerns could harm our brand."

Explicitly partnering with a repressive government, even a foreign one, could significantly damage Google's trust relationship with users around the world.

Which leads to my third point...

3. Google May Have To Make Concessions To Other Governments

If Google develops a search tool to the specifications of the Chinese government, it seems likely that other governments would make their own demands of the company around user data, search queries, email, documents, and so on.

Google must, of course, obey local rules regarding the information it collects and stores, as well as information it must legally disclose to law enforcement.

But governments might also see an opportunity to press for additional concessions outside of existing law. Google would have a harder time pushing back on such requests if it has set a precedent of full cooperation with China.

This is a serious issue in countries all across the democratic spectrum, including the United States, where intelligence services and law enforcement agencies are pressuring tech companies to weaken privacy and security controls such as encryption.

Just this month, for instance, a coalition of English-speaking democracies that share intelligence data, the so-called Five Eyes (the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) "...issued a memo calling on their governments to demand tech companies build backdoor access to their users' encrypted data," [according to a story in Tech Crunch](#).

And in April 2018, The Register [reported on renewed efforts in the U.S. Congress](#) to develop backdoors for law enforcement.

It would be hard to imagine a Google executive, testifying before Congress, to satisfactorily explain to stern-faced Senators why the company was willing to build a censor-friendly search tool for China, but refused to create a backdoor for the patriotic public servants in American law enforcement.

Core Principles

I understand that Google, and its parent company Alphabet, are under relentless pressure to grow the business, expand market share, and increase shareholder value.

I also understand that China is a potential source of growth and revenue, a source that Google has conceded to homegrown rivals for the past ten years since it exited the Chinese market.

But I also believe that Google, and its users, will be better served if the company sticks to its core principles, which the company itself elected to include in its [IPO prospectus](#) fourteen years ago:

"Don't be evil. We believe strongly that in the long term, we will be better served—as shareholders and in all other ways—by a company that does good things for the world even if we forgo some short term gains."

Packet Pushers Listener Survey: We Need Your Feedback!

It's that time of year when we come to you, virtual hats in hand, to ask for a few minutes of your time to [take our annual audience survey](#).

Your responses help us in several ways:

- Feedback helps us suck less at what we do now (we hope)
- Feedback informs new ideas and initiatives (entirely new ways to suck!)

- Aggregate audience data helps us attract sponsors (the whole money thing is icky, but we gotta eat)

We never share individual responses or any personalized details with anyone. If you have a few minutes, we'd really appreciate [your input](#). Thank you.



Thanks, Internet!

Amusing things wash up in our social media feed. This is one we liked.



SHARED BY PETE LUMBIS, A.K.A [@PETECCDE](#)

Packet Pushers News Bits

We generate a lot of content besides the long-form podcasts: short podcasts, blogs, news briefs, even video. These are a few recent posts.

Mist Enhances Machine Learning Capabilities To Improve WLAN Performance, Troubleshooting (Blog)

Mist has announced enhancements to its WLAN offering, including improving anomaly detection with newly added algorithms to analyze performance and system data, boosting the natural language processing capabilities of its Marvis virtual assistant, and automating Radio Resource Management (RRM).

[LINK](#)

Unconscious Competence and Imposter Syndrome From A Spa in Silicon Valley (Video)

I have reached the conclusion that imposter syndrome is healthy overall. You know you have more to learn and will act correctly to fill in the gaps.

The problems begin when people don't have imposter syndrome. They believe that they know enough (or everything) they need. I've been calling it 'unconscious incompetence'.

[LINK](#)

BiB 054: Create & Deploy Unikernels With NanoVMs (Podcast)

NanoVMs makes software to help you create and deploy unikernels. In this briefing, Ian discussed with me the state of the unikernel ecosystem and how NanoVMs fits into things.

[LINK](#)

The End Bit

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Human Infrastructure is bi-weekly newsletter with view, perspectives, and opinions. It is edited and published by Greg Ferro and Drew Conry-Murray from PacketPushers.net. If you'd like to contribute, email Drew at drew.conrymurray@packetpushers.net.

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