



BY BRIAN DIPERT, SENIOR TECHNICAL EDITOR

Bias and opinion in tech and in life

recently received a fairly critical e-mail that began with an eye-catching and eyebrow-raising subject line: “Bait and switch?” The reader who sent the e-mail appeared to be quite disappointed because of my recent cover story (**Reference 1**). In the article, I wrote about virtualization instead of covering hardware—specifically, CPU-instruction-set—emulation, which is the topic he was interested in. He was frustrated despite the fact that my article’s title began with the word *virtualization*, not *emulation*.

To be fair, the first draft of the article included a sidebar in which I’d explicitly directed readers to the *Brian’s Brain* blog, where they’d find a post on emulation, among others. The sidebar was cut at the last minute due to limited available space. Perhaps, had the sidebar survived the editing process and had he seen it, the reader would have been less disappointed. Then again, he admitted that he didn’t make it past the first paragraph of my article.

As I shook my head with bemusement and other emotions at this reader’s narrowly focused agenda, I thought back to one of the top sessions I attended in October at the Audio Engineering Society Convention. The panel session, titled “Engineering Mistakes We Have Made in Audio,” featured several well-known hardware and software technical experts.

I was gratified to see that many of the topics the panelists talked about were psychological in nature; that is, they were reflective of the tendency to enter into definition, design, and debugging situations with predetermined and rigid ideas of the end result. For example, there was the situation in which the computer hard drive failed

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and the presenter sequentially popped in—and ruined—*all* of the backup tapes before he discerned that the tape drive, not the tapes, had also gone bad. Similarly, another presenter fried an entire set of add-in cards by not realizing, until it was too late, that the backplane-connector hookup, not the add-in card design, was at fault.

I encounter examples of narrow, rigid perspectives and predetermined conclusions all the time in the feedback I receive to my online and print write-ups. Vudu-set-top-box owners, desperate to justify their investments, ignore the hard data that indicates that the company is making inappropriate use of their LAN and WAN bandwidth for its own benefit. Back in the days of the HD-DVD-versus-

Blu-ray-format war, equipment and content owners in each camp similarly fought with me and with each other, angry that I wouldn’t agree that their wallet-anointed preference was all-good—and the opposing camp’s option was all-bad. Apple and Linux backers think I’m a Microsoft mouthpiece. AMD and Nvidia fans respond the same way whenever I say anything remotely positive about Intel. Nobody, it seems, roots for the market leader.

However, I need to remain diligent regarding the possibility of narrow, rigid perspectives and predetermined conclusions creeping into my psyche, too. Unlike some other journalists, I don’t believe that being balanced means presenting an exactly equivalent number of pros and cons for each side of an issue. I do the research, in as undistorted a fashion as I can muster, and then I present the data and my conclusion. Because I’m a human being, not a computer or, for that matter, a Vulcan, I realize that my approach can’t be completely distortion-free, which is why I’m an advocate of network neutrality—enabling access to a diversity of perspectives by a thereby-informed populace. But what I *can* commit to is flexibility; as new data emerges, I strive to revisit and, if necessary, alter my previous conclusions.

I welcome your thoughts, either tech-specific or more general.**EDN**

REFERENCE

1 Dipert, Brian, “Virtualization: silicon and software salvation or technological tower of Babel?” *EDN*, Oct 2, 2008, pg 34, www.edn.com/article/CA6598366.

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[Go to www.edn.com/081205eda](http://www.edn.com/081205eda) for a more in-depth discussion of these topics.

[Read a follow-up blog post at www.edn.com/081205edb](http://www.edn.com/081205edb).