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## More From the Department of Dumb Ideas

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By **Jonathan Erickson**

November 5, 2001

After all these years, the Department of Dumb Ideas remains tucked away in a far corner of the warehouse here at BYTE world headquarters. That the department has maintained its anonymity is amazing in itself, considering the rich, never-ending fodder it has to work with.

For instance, we were recently able to hear loud voices back there debating whether Microsoft's recent move to bar access by many non-IE browsers to MSN by should be elevated to the level of a Dumb Idea. From what we can tell, the "nays" won out on the basis that the idea wasn't dumb, just mean spirited.

Attention then turned to the lawsuit that the DVD-CCA, a DVD licensing organization, filed in 2000 against Web publishers in general, and Andrew Bunner in particular, who had published DeCSS-related source code for using DVD players with Linux. Although a trial court ruled that Bunner, who had run across the public domain source code and simply reposted it, was guilty of trade secret misappropriation and therefore had to remove the source code from his web site, a California appellate court recently unanimously overturned the trial court's injunction. According to the appellate court ruling, "the California Legislature is free to enact laws to protect trade secrets, but these provisions must bow to the protections offered by the First Amendment." The court went on to find that the trial

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court's injunction barring publication of DeCSS "can fairly be characterized as a prohibition of 'pure' speech." Alas, our Department of Dumb Ideas was also unanimous in agreeing that the DVD-CCA's lawsuit was a Dumb Idea, as was the trial judge's injunction. However, the consensus was also that the appellate court's decision and the First Amendment protecting free speech were both really Good Ideas, and the debate ended up a draw.

Faced with a looming deadline to come up with the Dumb Idea of the month, the department was saved at the bell by a device called the "Express Desk" from Mobile Office Enterprise. In a nutshell, this contraption makes it possible for you to mount your laptop computer to the steering wheel of your car so that you can enter data while in the driver's seat. Of course, there is the caveat that the Express Desk is "not to be used while driving." Right. Just like shaving, reading the newspaper, applying make-up, and eating breakfast cereal from a bowl isn't supposed to be done while driving. But every commute-hour veteran has seen all this and more.

Whew, with a sign of relief, the Department of Dumb Ideas came through again, this month thanks to the Express Desk. Feel free to help out this overworked crew of dedicated professionals by sharing Dumb Ideas you've run across; just drop us some e-mail. Face it, there's no shortage of ideas out there.

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