

More tales of dead computers: My home desktop

 devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20061024-01

October 24, 2006



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Yes, I said that my next dead computer story would be the AlphaServer, but late-breaking news has forced me to shuffle the order a bit. My home computer has been circling the drain for several months. (The Northbridge fan would buzz and sometimes spin really slowly.) When the motherboard finally stopped powering on, I knew its time was up. Being the clueless geek I am, I figured, “No big deal. Swap out the motherboard and I’m back in business.” Easier said than done. For you see, my computer is so old, nobody makes motherboards compatible with the one I had. According to Wikipedia, not only has Socket A been discontinued, its replacements, Socket 754 and 939, have themselves been superseded (by AM2). I was two generations obsolete. Therefore, with the motherboard upgrade came a CPU upgrade and of course a RAM upgrade since my old PC-2100 RAM doesn’t work in the new motherboard (which wants PC-3200 but can slum it with PC-2700). After I got the new parts home, I realized that the new motherboard wants a PCI Express video card rather than my old AGP card, and it also needs a new power connector that my old ATX power supply doesn’t have, so I’ll need a new case and power supply, too. My simple “swap out the motherboard” has turned into a massive upgrade. I’m thinking I would have been better off just buying a Dell. I’m not out of the woods yet. I get everything all plugged in and hooked up, and the hard drives won’t spin up. Well, they do spin up, as long as I don’t plug in the IDE cable. But if I plug in the IDE cable, they refuse to spin. (Yes, I tried a different cable.) I don’t think it’s excessive power draw, because I get this even when I hook up just one hard drive, and when the IDE cable isn’t plugged into the motherboard, the drives spin up just fine. I’m baffled on this one.

Update: No, it’s not bad cabling, since I used the cables intact from the old computer. The exact same cables in the exact same configuration worked on the other computer. And the cables are keyed so I’m not installing them backwards. And it’s not lack of power. I fed power to the drive from the old computer’s power supply, and the same thing: Spins up if IDE cable disconnected. (What’s more: If the IDE cable is connected and the motherboard is powered off, the drive does not spin up.)

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