One Last Compile...

It works fine here

It is a commonly observed but little commented upon fact that software changes completely once it has been given to a client. You can test it to your heart's content in the office, load it onto different machines, load it onto 'clean' machines, get people in to try and break it, but to no avail. These things all help a little, sure. But you can't escape this fundamental truth: your software in your office is not the same as your software in the user's office. And that leads, I think, to some of the most demoralising, frustrating, downright humiliating experiences of my life. And that includes my friends finding out that I once wrote a fan letter to the blonde girl in Abba.

Deploying software is much like releasing a rabbit back into the wild. (You may prefer to think of your programs as gleaming tigers, beady-eyed falcons or majestic wildebeest. Me, I know my place in the food chain.) You hope the environment will be friendly, and that it will be able to fend for itself, without you having to put out lettuce leaves and water every morning. *[I'm not really sure this analogy is working. Ed]*. But a missing DLL or a rogue driver can be like the cruel roar of the poacher's shotgun *[Nope, it definitely isn't working. Try something else. Ed]* and all you can do is hunch mournfully over the carcass, mumbling something along the lines of 'Well, it works back at the office.'

90% of the time it isn't even our fault. But 100% of the time it's not possible to persuade the user of this. As far as the user is concerned, AMOS works fine. (AMOS is an acronym I've just invented, standing for that infuriating term 'All My Other Software'. Helpdesks around the world are hereby invited to adopt it.) They are uninterested in your rambling explanations about getting a new up-to-date copy of the video driver, unless you can do it for them. And if you do, you become their in-house, unpaid, hardware expert for life. Because in six months time when their secretary's printer on the other side of the room runs out of toner they will remember you tinkering, blame you, and demand you come in and fix it.

It's not that I'm bitter. Well, OK, bitterness comes into it. But it's also the feeling of helplessness that I hate. The problems and their causes can be so obscure, so odd, so downright unlikely that solving them is often a case of pure guesswork and wild leaps of intuition. Did you know that the BDE often fails to work if you've only got a standard VGA video driver? I mean, o\$%!@*!, as they used to say in my Asterix books. I could have worked on that for hundreds, no, thousands of years without ever once going into the display settings. And as for printing: don't get me started about the printer drivers of a Very Famous Printer Manufacturer. (Oh, go on, please, just a quick rant: why the o@\$%&&!!! should I have to write code that resets every pen and brush and possible printer setting known to man before daring to send something to be output? Thanks. I feel better now.)

The solution? There isn't one, not that I know of. You just have to be thick-skinned and ego-less, something that us programmers aren't renowned for. Alternatively, just call the user an idiot, swear at Microsoft, and then return to your superbly crafted, flawless program while daydreaming about Agnetha in her cat suit. That usually works for me.