

Odd things do happen. A call for help came from a friend who was unable to enter information into his spreadsheet. [Not the friend who had problems with his printing recently.]

He said that when he clicked on a cell to try entering numbers, a set of mysterious hollow circles appeared in the vicinity. This happened with many, but not all cells. A visit was deemed necessary to witness the extraordinary happenings.

Viewing the problem brought instant recognition, a laborious and simple cure, but no explanation: the spreadsheet was plastered in invisible Autoshape squares sitting in front of the cells.

An Autoshape is a useful device used in several applications. As the name implies it allows the creation of a shape that can add interest to documents. They come in a variety of shapes such as lines, circles, ovals, squares, rectangles, speech bubbles, stars, banners and so on. Each shape is customisable for infill colour or pattern; line colour style and thickness; size and proportion. They can be flipped, reversed and distorted at will.

When one is created, clicking on it will reveal eight or ten 'handles' that are used for manipulation.

One of the fill options is "No Fill" and a border option is "No Line". A shape so formatted is invisible on screen. Clicking inside the shape has no effect, but when a click hits the border the 'Handles' appear.

As my friend never uses Autosshapes he was understandably baffled when the little hollow circles of the handles appeared. Shapes are easily removed by selecting them and pressing the Delete key (of course).

Ah! You say. But how do you know where the lines are? You don't, but a shape will show up if the invisible line is in the way of any click you want to make – as was soon discovered as more and more shapes were found.

Getting rid of the shapes was simple but time-consuming as there turned out to be several hundred of them.

For some time the only spectator was the cat as the friend went off to make a cup of tea. Over the cup of tea we were debating the possible origin of so many invisible squares when the cat leapt onto the desk and started walking about. "He often keeps me company when I am working at my desk Oh!"

Now how could the cat possibly manage to select an Autosshape from a toolbar that was not on display; select a square; format it to be invisible both in Fill and Line and put several hundred of them onto a spreadsheet?

There is a theory that an infinite number of monkeys with an infinite number of typewriters and infinite time will eventually produce the full works of Shakespeare.

I suspect fewer cats would be needed.

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In Brief

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