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Vista Blacks Out Periodically – Windows Computer

Precis

This article is directed at Windows users having problems with their DMX output blacking out periodically caused by problems with the copy protection dongle. It is assumed version 2.2 (11328) or later of Vista 2 has been correctly installed. Users with older versions should update to 2.2(11328) or later before following the procedure detailed below.

Introduction

The Vista copy protection system uses a third party copy protection “dongle” made by Safenet/HASP. The Vista software regularly looks for this dongle, and if at any time it’s not found the software goes into “Demovisualiser Mode”. This mode is intended to allow people to demonstrate or try out the software, and to make it unusable in a show situation the software blacks out all DMX output for 5 seconds every 4-6 minutes. During the blackout the words “Black-Out” are displayed on the top bar next to the show name. Refer to Figure 1 at right.



Figure 1: Location of "Black-Out" indication

Most instances of random blackouts are caused by the dongle not being able to be seen by Vista. There are a number of reasons for this, and this document details the process required to troubleshoot.

1: Establish If The Dongle Is The Problem

The fastest way to establish if the software can see the dongle is by looking at the *About* dialogue under the *Help* menu. In this window the number of channels unlocked is indicated next to the “Available Channels”. If this number is 0, then no valid dongle has been found - proceed to the next step. Refer to Figure 2.



Figure 2: Help - About dialogue when no dongle connected

If the number is above 0, for example 128, 512 etc, there is nothing wrong with the copy protection and cause of the blackout problem lies elsewhere. Possible causes include the dongle connection being intermittent (sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't), or a DMX cabling problem. Note that it may take a minute or two for the dongle to be recognised after it has been plugged in.

2: Check the dongle is plugged in

The dongle is a USB device and must be plugged into an active USB port on the computer in order to be recognised. If a USB hub must be used to connect the dongle, use only a powered hub.

Some of the Vista consoles have the capability to house the dongle within the console chassis. If this is the case contact the console supplier to establish the actual dongle location.

Unplug and re-insert the dongle while listening for the telltale USB disconnect/reconnect sounds normally made by Windows when this occurs. If the sounds are not heard, try another port. If no ports work, check the Power Settings for the machine and ensure that no USB power save settings are enabled, and the Hibernate option is not checked.



Figure 3: 1024 Channel dongle

When the dongle has been correctly recognised, the red LED should be illuminated. Once the computer makes the normal telltale USB sounds when the dongle is inserted, proceed to the next step. If no sound is heard, the dongle may be faulty – try installing Vista and dongle on another computer.

3. HASP Drivers

Check the dongle appears in the correct location. In the Windows XP Control Panel select *System*, then *Hardware* tab, then *Device Manager*. In the Windows 7 Control Panel select *System and Maintenance*, then *System*, then *Device Manager*.

Once the Device Manager dialogue is open, click on the “+” sign next to *Universal Serial Bus Controllers*. The computer will display a list of attached USB devices. The three “SafeNet Inc” devices are a result of the Vista dongle. Refer to Figure 4.

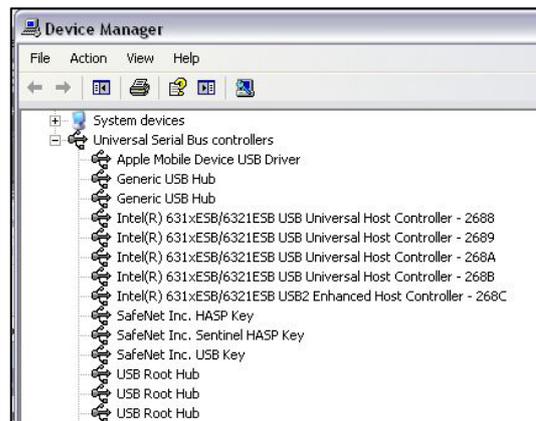


Figure 4: Device Manager dialogue showing the three Safenet devices of one Vista dongle

If any of the Safenet devices have a warning or error symbol next to them, right-click on each of the devices in turn and select “Uninstall”. When all have been uninstalled, unplug the dongle, reboot the computer, and re-install Vista. If this doesn’t work proceed to the step 4.

If there are no devices in the list that can be attributed to the USB dongle, unplug the dongle while watching the Device Manager list. If the list changes/refreshes, the dongle has been recognised as a USB device and should appear somewhere. If the list doesn’t change then the dongle isn’t being recognised by the computer – in this case return to step 2.

4. Update drivers

If there are any devices in the Device Manager that can be attributed to the Vista dongle, right-click on each of the devices in turn and select “Uninstall”. Then unplug the dongle and reboot the computer.

Download the latest drivers from the following website:

<http://www.safenet-inc.com/technical-support/>

Select “HASP” drivers from the ‘Select Product’ dropdown in the middle of the page. This will link to the HASP download page. Make selections as follows:



- User Category: End user
- Product: HASP HL
- Type: Runtime and Device Driver

Click on *Search*.

Select [Sentinel HASP/LDK Windows GUI Run-time Installer](#), download the driver, and install it.

Install Vista.

Plug in the dongle and check the channels are in the Help menu. Note that it may take a minute or two for the dongle to be recognised after it has been plugged in.

Notes

With some Sentinel/HASP releases the dongle driver software updates the information on the dongle. Under these circumstances the dongle LED will flash. Do not unplug the dongle or remove power when this occurs – wait for the dongle to stop flashing before removing power. If the dongle LED is still flashing after 10 minutes, the update has failed.

Refer to TBJLT159 for information on updating drivers for Windows 8.