

readers' writes

There are several rants and very few raves in our postbag this month, with Microsoft, Parcelforce, OneTel and staff in electrical stores all in the firing line. We're glad to say praise for *PC Advisor* isn't something you find a problem, though

Doorstep undesirables

January's star letter commenting on the frustration of finding additional charges hidden on the last page of web shopping sites gives only part of the story. I persevered with my online Office XP Upgrade purchase through all the frustrations Stan Sutherland mentioned, pleasantly surprised that even the shipping charges were not excessive considering the goods were coming from America. Altogether I was saving about £30 on the best home deal I could find.

Delivery took about a week but the Parcelforce man wouldn't leave the package, or the doorstep, until I had handed over just under £40, about £27 of which was VAT (which I resented but, deep down, just about expected) and another charge of £13 which was called a 'clearance fee'. Parcelforce head office told me this is a fee that Parcelforce charges for paying HM Customs the VAT due.

Now if that isn't an unjust hidden charge I don't know what is. And there's nothing mentioned about that on the penultimate online purchasing page, nor any other for that matter.

Tony Clappison, via email

Oleds, Foleds and Toleds

I read *PC Advisor* (issue 88, January 03) this morning at 1.30am (my college is undergoing an Ofsted inspection at the moment so I have trouble sleeping) and found that not only had somebody written an article about searching the internet using boolean terms – something which I taught three lessons on last week (if only I'd read it sooner) – but you'd also written all about Oleds (organic light emitting diodes), a subject in which I have a serious interest and that I added to my students' syllabus under the new technology section.

We cover Foleds (flexible Oleds), Toleds (transparent Oleds), and standard Oleds and their applications, where they're currently being used and their possible future uses as well as their disadvantages, such as lifespan. Not details manufacturers are keen to share.

By the way, did you know that the rock band Genesis invested heavily in Oled technology in the early 90s?

Steve Humphries, lecturer in ICT, via email

What you see isn't what you get

Am I the only PC user who gets very frustrated at the colour differences in printed output compared with the image on the monitor? Is it beyond the industry's capabilities to produce hardware with automatically configured colour profiles, thus doing away with the need to use what seems to be a frighteningly complicated colour management system?

Surely the first manufacturer (such as HP or Epson) to market a scanner and printer with built-in profiles would steal a march on the opposition?

Terry Doust, via email

Spencer Dalziel replies: colour matching is an absolute nightmare and the closest we

could get to eradicating the differences in colour output would be if one manufacturer were responsible for building all imaging devices. Even then the problem can't be fully resolved.

Monitors display colours that printers can't print and printers can print colours that monitors can't show. The sensors in cameras and scanners are able to register colours that neither monitors nor printers are equipped to reproduce. Not an easy problem to solve.

Colour management system profiling is a gamut compensation mechanism that addresses the colour differences between devices and, chore that it is, it's the best thing we've got.

Archive to survive

Is there a PDF archive similar to the 2000/2001 CD cataloguing all *PC Advisors* from issue one to the present day? I'm running out of space and would willingly pay for a CD or DVD to replace the old magazines.

QuickHare, via email

Rosemary Haworth replies: we're glad you like PC Advisor so much but we don't believe there's sufficient demand for such old issues. However, you can download electronic PDF versions of the feature content by following the Magazine link on our website. Of course, if you have a scanner you could always create your own electronic archive of the issues you want to keep. We featured a PDF creator on our May 02 cover disc.

Community service

I signed up with OneTel about six months ago for both a telephone line and internet access. After some teething problems, OneTel's technical helpline got me up and running. Calls were charged at 50p per minute, with an anticipated waiting time of, say, six minutes if you were lucky. I had therefore clocked up £3 before I started.



Now the charge is at national rate, which sounds more reasonable. But I phone and wait and the minutes tick by and by and, after 20 minutes, my patience fails and I slam down the phone.

Money for old rope, OneTel. Our local libraries now have banks of the latest Dell computers which allow free usage to members (and membership is free). A few minutes drive and I can use the internet for at least two hours, all for free. As for OneTel – why bother?

Eddie Thurgood, Bangor, Co Down

Andrew Charlesworth replies: how many times do we bang on about the need for good support in the pages of PC Advisor? It's as important as the price you pay for the goods or service in the first place.

You cannot be SE-rious!

According to the December edition of *PC Advisor*, Microsoft will no longer be supporting Windows 98 SE. My concern with this is that if I need to reload Windows at any time, I will be unable to update it from the Microsoft website.

This is unacceptable – I am being forced to buy a new version of Windows that I can't afford. Is there anyway of saving the downloaded updates or would Microsoft supply them on a CD as they have with Windows XP?

Watts, Exeter

Ursula Seymour replies: as of June 2003 Microsoft will no longer be supporting Windows 98, SE version or otherwise. The best way to ensure that you have the latest version of the operating system, should you want to do a fresh install at a future date, would be to download all the latest patches and updates and burn them to a CD for safekeeping. The latest updates for Windows 98 are available at support.microsoft.com/default.spx?scid=/support/servicepacks/Windows/98/default.asp.

Microsoft is unlikely to provide these updates on a CD, as it relies on an online update model for its latest operating system, Windows XP. You might be able to pick up the latest Windows 98 disc, with all the updates included, at a computer trade fair. But as Windows XP becomes more standard, finding older software will naturally become more difficult.

Star letter

I have had my legitimate copy of Windows XP for some time and, of course, registered it on the day of purchase and installation. I was not aware that it was also tracking everything that happened within my PC beyond the normal Add/Remove programs.

You can imagine my surprise when, after installing a further 512MB of RAM, my PC refused to load beyond the startup screen because my 'PC had changed significantly' and had to be 'reregistered with Microsoft'. The screen would not allow anything further than connecting to the internet and registering my PC.

What right does Microsoft, or any other software supplier, have to deny me access to my machine? The PC cost many more times than the software on it, all properly purchased and licensed from the individual suppliers.

We appear to be being spied on pretty much by everything we load in our PCs and it is time it stopped. Is it any wonder many companies are still running old operating systems when newer versions are released full of bugs and security flaws and are now spying on every move you make? ISPs have to retain your emails for years but they cannot stop obvious spam from reaching your mailbox.

Please, Microsoft, give us back control of our lives and machines before we start to lose trust in you and stop using our PCs for anything confidential. Perhaps it is all a conspiracy to build up the Royal Mail again. After all, who is reading our land mail letters?

George Monaghan, via emails

Our star letter writer wins a Canon SmartBase MPC400, worth £249 inc VAT. This four-colour, multifunction device combines a printer, copier and scanner in one compact flatbed unit. See www.canon.co.uk/multifunction for more information.

If you want to air your views in these pages, please write to PC Advisor, FREEPOST 20 LON87018, London W1E 4AN, fax us on 020 7580 1935, or email us at pcadvisor_letters@idg.com. Please mark emails 'Readers' writes' in the subject heading.



Be aware of your wares

I cannot get over the fact that many large electrical retailers still do not train their staff adequately about the goods they're selling. I have been in two such outlets recently where staff members have confessed to not knowing much about PCs. One even told me that all he knew was that you could play games on them.

To most people a computer is a fairly hefty financial commitment. How can these retailers expect to satisfy their customers' needs if their staff don't have enough knowledge of what they are selling?

It may be okay to know very little if you are selling a customer a fridge but I am sure that they must lose a lot of potential computer sales to shops where the staff advise their customers properly and help them find the right machine for their

needs. There is no excuse in this day and age for not ensuring staff have good product knowledge.

Seonag Saunders, Perthshire.

Ben Camm-Jones replies: it's frustrating to be met with ignorance and apathy when you're about to part with hard cash. Though many stores will have training programs for their staff you can never be sure how much the people on the shop floor will know – some of them might only have been there for a matter of days.

If you can't get answers from the general staff, ask to see a supervisor and if you're told they're busy then insist until you get the answers you need. The alternative, as you suggest, is taking your custom elsewhere. After all, there are plenty of specialist PC stores out there. ■