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Dell and Mesh get tangled in a software mix-up, a reader misinterprets the small print and, while Savastore loses a customer, Symantec goes beyond the call of duty for one punter



Another fine Mesh

Reader Jaromir Drazil contacted us after taking up an offer with Mesh Computers advertised in the April 03 edition of *PC Advisor*. The deal offered readers £100 off a Mesh Matrix system and included a free copy of Microsoft's WorkSuite 2003. Jaromir sent his order to Mesh along with a copy of the offer page, but when he received his system he noticed the promised software was missing.

He contacted the company twice by mail and several times by phone only to be told he would be called back. But a month later he still hadn't received a reply so he wrote to us. Once we got on to Mesh the problem was resolved within a few hours. The finger of blame pointed to an administrative error and Mesh agreed to send out a full copy of the software with an apology. It's just a shame this same level of customer service wasn't enjoyed by Jaromir straight away.

If you have any similar issues with Mesh, you can email the company directly at meshresponse@meshcomputers.com.

Dell double mix-up

Last month we told you about reader Chris Wilson's software problem with Dell. He had been sent trial software instead of

the full packages advertised. We are pleased to report that Chris has now been refunded after shelling out for full versions. But his problem did not end there. He purchased the Dell system in order to download and edit home videos before copying them to DVD.

Unfortunately, Chris misread the company's brochure – an easy mistake when you are presented with a sea of technical information – and ended up purchasing a system containing a DVD/CD-RW combo drive instead of the necessary DVD-RW drive.

As soon as the machine arrived he realised his mistake and tried to return the PC to Dell. Despite the fact that the machine was less than 30 days old, Dell refused to take it back. The company offered him a 'special' deal on a separate

drive, which would leave Chris with two DVD drives and £250 out of pocket. Time for ConsumerWatch to intervene. At our behest, Dell contacted Chris and after long negotiation, agreed to refund the cost of his existing drive if he bought a DVD-RW drive at full cost. Chris was happy with this fair arrangement, and can now finally use his system for the purpose originally intended.

Serving you right

This month's pat on the back goes to antivirus software vendor Symantec.

Reader Geoffrey Marshall contacted us after taking up an offer he had seen on the internet to purchase the company's Norton AntiVirus 2003 Deluxe software for just \$29.99 (£19) – less than half its usual price.

Geoffrey emailed his payment details as requested, but after an unsuccessful attempt to download the software Marshall began to worry. The next day he received two confirmation emails that the payment had been taken successfully from his account – twice – yet he still could not download the software.

So Geoffrey contacted Symantec. It soon became clear that he had been duped by a bogus offer. Symantec did not recognise the booking number and had no record of Marshall's order. Unfortunately, there was little we could do to help retrieve the two payments but, as a goodwill gesture, Symantec said it would send Geoffrey a copy of Norton Deluxe free of charge. "If you see a great offer then make sure you check it is from a

Changes to Sale of Goods Act: your rights

- **Right to sue** **The right to bring an action up to six years after the date of purchase still stands.**
- **Burden of proof** **It is now the sellers' duty to prove goods were not faulty at point of purchase, for the first six**

months after purchase, removing this burden from the buyer.

- **Binding agreement** **All guarantees offered by the seller will be legally binding and must take the form of a clearly written contract.**

recognised retailer before you buy it," advised a spokeswoman at Symantec. "Contact the manufacturer directly if need be. And remember: if an offer seems too good to be true, it usually is."

Time and time again

Time Computers is one of the few companies to have a regular presence in our ConsumerWatch forum, giving it direct access to consumer complaints and problems.

Reader and forum visitor 'Luck' logged in to complain about a machine he had purchased from Time. After seeing an advert for the machine which said it had a 'new GeForce FX 128MB graphics card', he believed this meant the latest FX 5800 model, but when the computer arrived it contained a budget version of the card.

As we've said before, you should never assume a computer comes supplied with a certain component – if the advert is not precise then it is always in your best interests to contact the supplier directly.

"I would like to stress we never advertised a GeForce FX 5800," said

PC Advisor personal data privacy campaign

Have you ever been sold a PC that had someone else's information on? Or has a PC you returned to a company been resold without being properly wiped? If either of these things have happened to you, we want to hear from you. If you find a previous customer's data on a PC purchased from the Dixons Stores Group don't forget to email Simon Turner the managing director at simon.turner@dixons.co.uk.



Email us at pcadvisor_consumerwatch@idg.com and we'll take it from there

Savastore

PC Advisor reader Neil Deerey ordered a monitor from online retailer Savastore, part of Watford Electronics. When he placed his order the site showed over 100 of the monitors were available, but just two days later it said the product was out of stock.

The company contacted Neil the next day – three days after he placed his order – to tell him it could not fulfil its two-day

instruction. Consequently the monitor was dispatched five days after his original order. When Neil contacted Savastore again to repeat his cancellation request, he was advised not to accept the goods if he no longer wished to purchase them.

This should have been the end of things, but unfortunately his neighbour signed for the goods on his behalf so Neil contacted Savastore to arrange for collection of the unwanted monitor. However, he works during the week and Savastore do not collect at weekends so Neil was charged for the goods and the company refused a refund until the monitor was returned. After four weeks of waiting for a collection date he returned the monitor by recorded delivery at his own expense. Savastore assured us that Neil would be credited immediately.

However at time of press Savastore was still considering a second request from Neil for reimbursement of his postal expenses. The firm did refuse to pay so-called storage charges demanded by Neil for holding the monitor at his house. Neil is taking his case to the small claims court, and we'll update you on how he gets on in a future ConsumerWatch. ■

You should never assume a computer comes supplied with a certain component – if the advert is not precise then it is always in your best interests to contact the supplier directly

Time's spokesman Chris Woolford. "It is always wise to double-check if you are unsure about a certain specification.

The moral of this story is check everything so you know exactly what you're buying. Make sure you get it in writing so that, if the components aren't those specified, the onus will be on the company, not you.

delivery promise on this occasion and that the goods would be dispatched the following day.

Rather than wait, though, Neil decided to cancel his order. In fact, after hearing nothing back from the retailer, he cancelled it twice more. But Savastore says it never received note of this

Z How to contact us

Got a problem with a manufacturer or vendor? Unsure of your consumer rights? Interested in a company's reputation? Get yourself to the ConsumerWatch forum.

www.pcadvisor.co.uk/consumerwatch



defining broadband

As the industry continues to bob in a state of confusion over the precise definition of what constitutes a broadband connection, Forum Editor Peter Thomas offers a helping hand – with the aid of some *PC Advisor* readers

Readers of *PC Advisor*, it would seem, are the only people clear about what exactly constitutes broadband speeds. In a recent poll a considerable majority indicated that broadband starts at 512Kbps (kilobits per second). Well over half (56.8 percent) considered 512Kbps downstream speeds to be broadband's rightful starting point, while just one in five (21 percent) considered a 128Kbps service to constitute broadband.

Yet the results fly in the face of a recent definition announced by industry watchdog Ofcom. The regulator decided to define the line between dialup narrowband and broadband based on the downstream speeds of existing services in the UK.

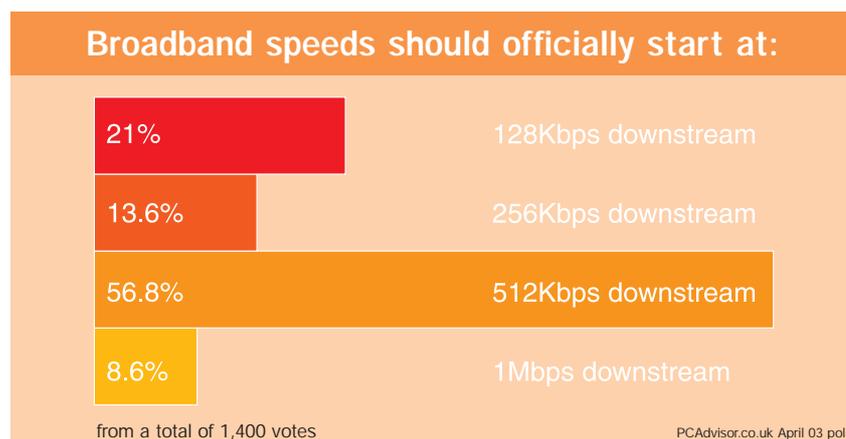
"Given the availability of a 256Kbps broadband internet access product from Tiscali, the Director [of Telecoms] currently considers that it is appropriate to define broadband internet access at speeds in excess of 256Kbps since the products currently available above this speed will allow different content, such as streaming video, to be delivered," the regulator said in a statement.

Muddy waters

Of course this didn't stop the UK's two cable companies, NTL and Telewest, smiling from ear to ear last month, as the UK's one millionth cable 'broadband' customer was signed up. Even the government was prompted to voice its pleasure at the passing of this milestone.

"It was just six months ago that the UK tipped the one million broadband subscriptions mark. I am delighted that in this short time this has become one million connections via cable alone," said eCommerce minister Stephen Timms.

Timms' comment is a little ironic given the fact that well over a third (380,000) of these 'broadband' customers take NTL's 150Kbps service. And the waters were further muddied recently when the ASA (Advertising Standards Authority) stuck



its oar into the debate by rapping NTL on the knuckles for advertising its entry-level broadband service as 'high-speed access'.

Responding to a complaint lodged by rival ISP Freeserve and a member of the public, the ASA ruled that the NTL advertising – which referred to 'high-speed broadband internet [for] only £14.99 a

The confusion surrounding the true definition of broadband is likely to get worse later this year, as ISPs introduce so-called 'midband' services – pitched somewhere between 128Kbps and 600Kbps

month' – was likely to mislead consumers, and that the term 'broadband' should be accompanied by an explanatory statement concerning speed.

Broadly speaking

The confusion surrounding the true definition of broadband is likely to get worse later this year as ISPs introduce so-called 'midband' services, pitched somewhere between 128Kbps and 600Kbps. Qualification of speeds will increase in importance as fierce competition prompts a range of services.

BT midband 128Kbps services launch in June priced £35 a month including line rental; by comparison, NTL charges £17.99 for its 150Kbps service. BT also has wholesale 256Kbps in the pipeline.

At the other end of the scale both NTL and Telewest currently offer a 1Mbps (megabit per second) service and BT will trial 1Mbps ADSL later this year, while a clutch of ISPs have started offering 2Mbps ADSL residential broadband. Not to be outdone, Telewest is also piloting a 2Mbps service. Confused? You will be.

It's hardly surprising that most readers opted for 512Kbps – the standard set by BT when it first launched its residential ADSL service back in 2000. Rather than sticking stubbornly to its claim that its product is genuine broadband, NTL should be encouraging its 380,000 or so 150Kbps customers to upgrade to its 600Kbps service. That way they can properly experience the many flash-based websites out there and help usher in broadband Britain. ■

searching for help

The ConsumerWatch forum on the *PC Advisor* website now has more than 60,000 postings primed with comments about customer service and consumer rights. Guy Dixon shows you how to take it for a spin

As regular readers will know, most of the stories we deal with in this section arise from issues aired in the online ConsumerWatch forum at www.pcadvisor.co.uk/consumerwatch.

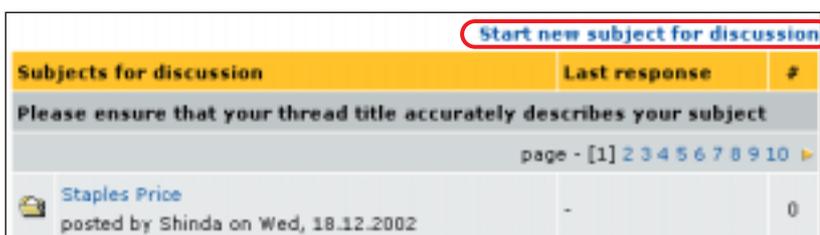
While we're more than happy to receive emails and letters from aggrieved readers, and do everything we can to help, a trip to the ConsumerWatch forum is more likely to result in a rapid and useful response.

Help yourself

We have a live walk-in consumer affairs clinic, which will automatically send you an email the moment that someone responds to your query. The ConsumerWatch forum is constantly checked by editorial members of staff, our forum editor, IT consultant Peter Thomas and the UK computer industry's leading vendors including Dell, Evesham, Mesh, Multivision, Time and many others.

Last, but not least, our online forum is manned by dozens of knowledgeable website regulars, ready and willing to lend a hand. Whether it's delivery problems, faulty goods or poor service you're experiencing, the ConsumerWatch forum is here to help. ■

Live clinic



1 To make a posting click on 'Start new subject for discussion'

2 Enter a description of your problem next to 'Title' – for example, 'Monitor keeps flickering: just three weeks old'. Enter a more detailed description in the dialog box next to 'Message' and click 'Begin new subject for discussion'



3 The posting appears at the top of the forum threads. When

someone responds to your thread you're notified by email. Once your problem is successfully resolved click the resolved checkbox. Visitors can now sift answered queries from unanswered ones

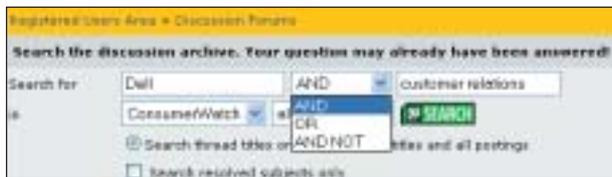
Search facilities

Visitors not only use the ConsumerWatch forum for live help, but also to get background information

using its impressive search facilities.

There are over 60,000 messages sitting in the database, so you can check on the reputation of a manufacturer or retailer.

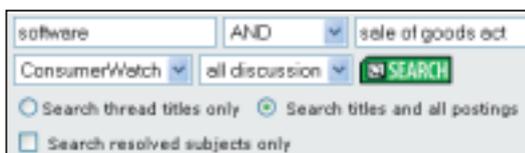
Alternatively, you can search for consumer rights issues under a specific term.



1 Search using Boolean logic terms in your search title, such as 'and', 'or' and 'and not'



2 There's different levels of targeting to choose from – for example, the most highly targeted is a request to search on resolved subjects only or thread titles only



3 Alternatively, search for obscure topics on a much broader level by opting for 'Search titles and all postings', such as a search on 'software' and 'Sale of Goods Act'