

While not the simplest of transactions, you might think that buying a PC would be a relatively easy operation. After all, it is a lot of money to pay out and it is in the vendor's interest to keep the customer satisfied. Alas this is by no means always the case, as two of our readers know only too well

We expect the process of purchasing a PC to be smooth and uncomplicated, especially if it's a standard package. Granted it's not like buying a tin of beans, but there is an expectation that your average supplier should be able to take the sting out of the accepted progression of order, payment and delivery. When this doesn't happen, customers can soon lose faith in a company.

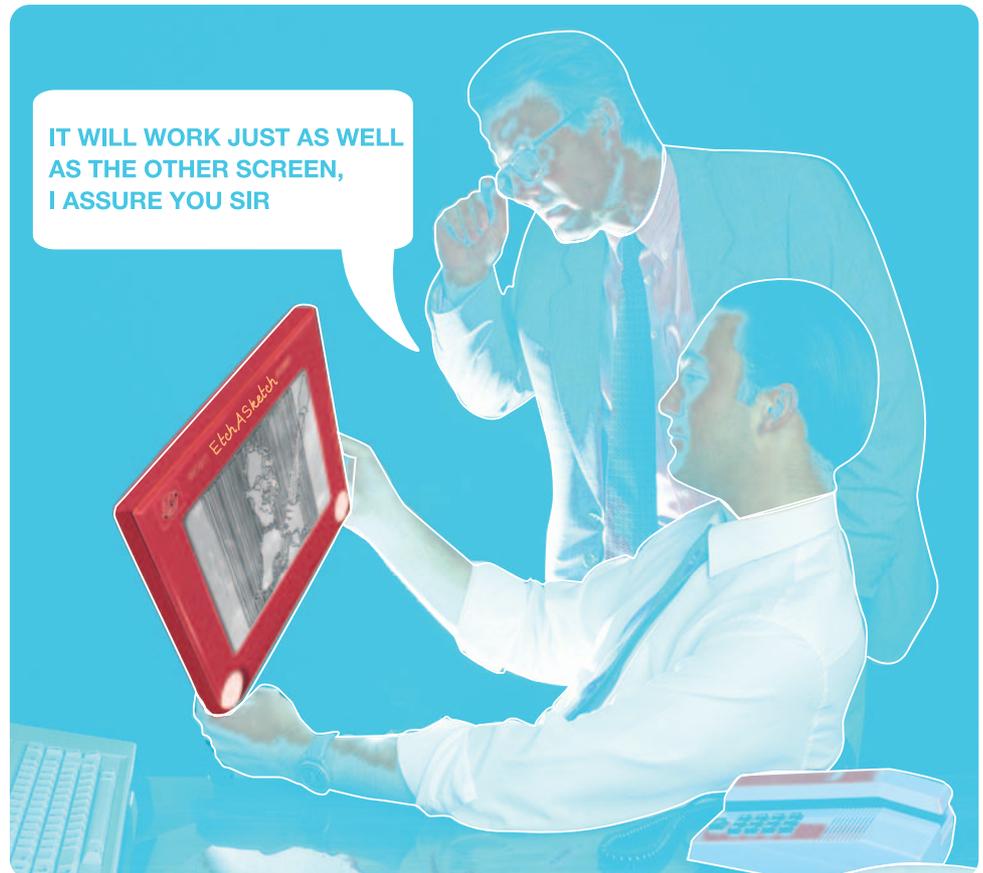
*PC Advisor* reader Peter Dyson contacted us part way through buying a PC from Carrera when the process ran into a problem. Subsequent to receipt of the invoice for his system, Peter had been contacted by Carrera and told that the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB screen he was expecting to come with his system was no longer in production, so would he accept a ViewSonic G90FB? A search on the internet showed that the ViewSonic was worth considerably less than the Mitsubishi (about £80 retail) and Peter wanted to ask us whether he was being diddled.

We told him that because he'd paid for a system of a certain specification, he was entitled to be supplied with the same or better than what had been agreed. We also called Carrera up to find out how it had ended up making this sort of offer and why its website was still advertising the Mitsubishi screen.

## What's the story?

Here things started to get a bit complicated. We were told that the Mitsubishi screen was actually still available but there was a delay in Carrera's supply of units. Customers who had ordered systems including this screen could either take an alternative or wait a couple of weeks for the Mitsubishi.

But in the interim Peter had explored a more informal avenue with the company, pointing out the different prices of the screens and asking for a discount. Carrera offered



to knock £20 off the price of his system and he accepted because he wanted to get his hands on his new system. Unfortunately this was still to prove something of an effort.

Having accepted the deal on a Wednesday, Peter arranged for delivery on the Friday because he couldn't be at home Thursday. He still had to pay the next-day delivery fee of £34, as this is a standard delivery price for all Carrera systems.

However, having waited at home for most of the Friday, Peter was called at 5.50pm and informed that his system would be there on Monday. He was understandably irritated by this and demanded the return of his next-day delivery fee.

## PCA power

When this was refused Peter mentioned that he had been talking to *PC Advisor* and that

he would be updating us on the situation. Apparently at this point the Carrera representative became somewhat cagey. He asked what good talking to us would do and eventually asked Peter to leave us out of it, at least until he had received his computer on the Monday.

To Peter's surprise, at 8am the next morning his system arrived. He was relieved but still begrudged paying a next-day delivery fee only to receive his system a day late - and only then after having to threaten media action.

So we called up Carrera systems again and asked why Peter wouldn't be refunded for a service he had paid for but not received. Nick Smit of Carrera told us that there wasn't a compensation procedure and that the margins on the systems they sold were slim enough so all customers paid for delivery.

After some discussion, Smit admitted that it was Carrera's fault that Peter had wasted a day off work and that as a goodwill gesture he would offer to refund half the delivery fee. Despite his belief that he should get the whole fee back, which ConsumerWatch agrees with, Peter accepted.

However, he was left feeling rather aggrieved. "I will never deal with the company again and would not recommend them," he says. "It is a very good value machine but Carrera shouldn't have messed me around." But for a bit of clarity on the phone and an efficient delivery process, Carrera would have had a happy customer enthusiastically spreading its good name.

Putting Carrera's bad timekeeping aside, part of Peter's problem came from his own way of dealing with the situation. If he had insisted on his rights he would have been able to get the screen he wanted, although it would have arrived a couple of weeks late.

### Is there anybody there?

Another reader who took matters into his own hands and found he got less than he deserved was Bob Evans from Hampshire. Bob has a PC from Watford Systems, the CD drive of which started to malfunction after about five months. This led Bob to commence a series of unsuccessful attempts to contact Watford before he finally got the company's attention.

He sent emails between 13 October and 10 November and spent a long time waiting for his phone calls to be answered. On one occasion Bob says he spent 25 minutes waiting on the phone, only to be cut off.

Eventually one of Bob's messages was answered with a phone call and he was told of the two alternatives open to him. He could either send the CD drive in to be fixed or an engineer would be dispatched for an onsite repair.

After a frustrating episode in which the representative unsuccessfully tried to talk Bob through removing the drive from his PC tower, it was agreed that another representative would call Bob soon to arrange a time for the visit.

That call never came, so he took his system to a local computer shop and got them to replace the drive for £64. When he contacted us he was trying to get Watford to cover the bill, which it declined to do. This is understandable because no company wants to lay itself open to covering third-party costs that may be way outside their own budget.

### The wait explained

Pippa Owens, Watford customer services manager, told us that: "Watford is happy to fix its mistake". The company has offered to replace the defunct drive, which Bob still has, or give him the money it would have spent on the drive, which it estimates at £20.

On the subject of the low response rate, Owens says that Watford always has lengthy waiting times on its phonelines because it regards itself as an 'etail' company and prefers to communicate with its customers via email. In addition, October was a busy month for Watford which may account for the lengthy delay in answering those emails.

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### Centrino controversy

Readers who watch a bit of TV in their spare time may have seen Intel's latest advertisement for its Centrino laptops, showing a snowblown thrillseeker at the Everest base camp logging on to the internet wirelessly via a Wi-Fi hotspot. The advertisement has caused some controversy because some viewers found it misleading. A readers poll on the *PC Advisor* website tested your opinion on this and found conclusively that the majority of you agreed.

The ITC (Independent Television Commission) tells us that it has received over 100 complaints about the advert, mostly expressing doubt that there is a hotspot at the Everest base camp and that a laptop would work in the sub-zero temperatures you would experience there. However, Dell has responded that there is indeed a Wi-Fi hotspot there and it has successfully logged on to the web with a Centrino laptop using it. Whether it did this late on a winter's night remains to be seen.

In the light of this, the ITC is unlikely to uphold the complaints when it reports on the advert in the coming weeks - which it will do in its new incarnation as OfCom. If anyone else has been adventurous enough to cart their laptop up the world's highest mountain, ConsumerWatch would love to hear about it. ☒

## 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 has 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, DSG's managing director, at [simon.turner@dixons.co.uk](mailto:simon.turner@dixons.co.uk).

Email us at [pcadvisor\\_consumerwatch@idg.com](mailto:pcadvisor_consumerwatch@idg.com) and we'll take it from there