



CTX's shock release of a flat-panel screen guaranteed to have no dead pixels raises the question: how many pixels could you do without?

Elsewhere, Demon puts a reader through purgatory when he tries to end his contract while Epson seems to be staffed by angels

Taiwanese monitor manufacturer CTX resurrected an old ConsumerWatch chestnut last month by unleashing an LCD (liquid crystal display) monitor with a 101-day guarantee for absolutely no dead pixels, setting itself an almost unattainable standard. The 15in LCD S530 costs around £299 inc VAT and is the first monitor to carry such a guarantee for a product at a mainstream price point.

Sights set high

LCD screens are made up of rows and columns of pixels that combine to create text and images onscreen. Each pixel has three separate subpixels (red, green and blue) that allow an image to be viewed in full colour. The subpixels' transistors turn them on or off depending on whether they are needed to create the image.

There are millions of subpixels within each display. In many LCD screens an odd transistor will not work correctly and will appear to be off when it should be on. Producing a screen in which every single pixel functioned at mass market consumer price points had previously been thought to be prohibitively expensive.

In spring last year, the ISO 13406-2 standard was set to address this issue. LCD screens are now described as belonging to one of three classes: class 1, class 2 or class 3. Only class 1 allows for no imperfections and its members' prices have made them as rare as hen's teeth.

The standard has resulted in considerable confusion, with even

PC Advisor readers unaware that dead pixels were regarded as acceptable by monitor manufacturers. In a recent poll on the PC Advisor website more than 40 percent of respondents said they believed the standard ensured that LCD monitors should be blemish-free.

Most LCD monitors conform to class 2 or 3. CTX's newly announced S530 monitor is the only product on the market that appears to conform to the class 1 standard and to be priced as if it were a less-costly class 2 model.

"Many screens are perfect when first purchased. It's guaranteeing the product won't develop dead pixels that's the hard part," said sceptical Iiyama senior support engineer Ian Thompson.

Despite CTX's claims that dead pixels "have caused serious consternation among consumers", Iiyama, whose screens comply with the class 2 standard, claims it has received no such complaints.

"Generally, if there were a few dead pixels users wouldn't even notice," said Thompson. "We never receive complaints about dead pixels, but then we do not comply to the class 1 standard."

However, visitors to our ConsumerWatch forum are concerned about buying LCD screens for that very reason. "I am almost at the point of buying a TFT but the one thing that held me back is the dead pixel issue," said reader and forum regular John Dalton. Other forum contributors have experienced the dead pixel issue firsthand.

"My own monitor was pixel-perfect on arrival but later developed one dead pixel and then, six or so months later, a dead subpixel," said Hounslow-based reader Joe Black.

"I can live with one or two dead pixels provided they are out of sight, so to speak," he said. "What would please me more than just having no dead pixels on arrival is a reasonable guarantee that none were expected to develop during its lifetime."

Demon licensing

At the end of March reader Gerlinde Krug phoned Demon to get a Universal Turnpike Licence as he was planning to cancel his Demon account but wanted to keep Demon's proprietary Turnpike software, which can be configured to use other ISPs. He paid the £17.62 fee by cheque and was told that he would be phoned with the details of his licence once the cheque had arrived.

Nothing happened for a fortnight after he sent the cheque. When he received his bank statement in mid-April he saw that the money for the licence had come out of his account on 10 April.

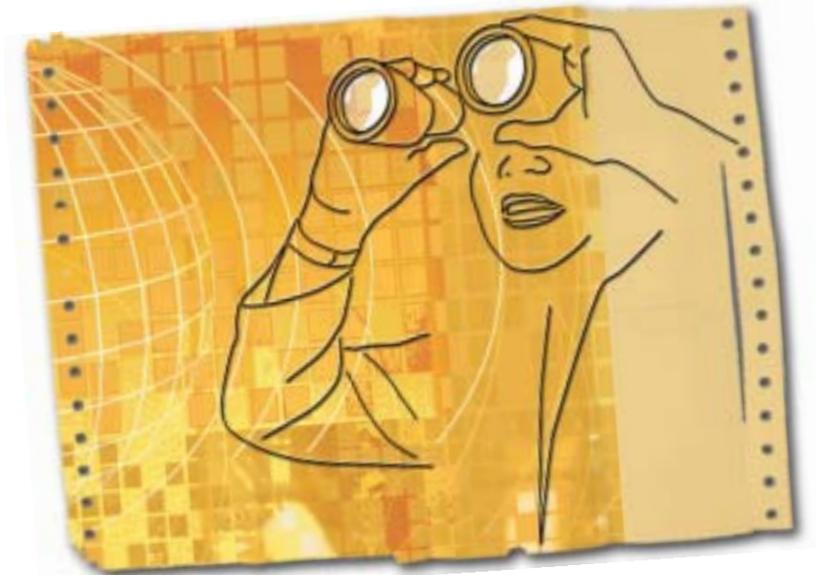
As he had not received anything from Demon, either by phone or by mail, he wrote a letter of complaint on 20 April, which was answered five days later stating that his complaint had been forwarded "for a full investigation" and that he should receive a reply "within 15-20 working days".

No trouble, it seems, is too great for Epson's customer services department. "And all for a £50 printer!" exclaimed our happy reader

As the reply never materialised, he wrote a second letter on 27 May demanding to receive his licence. He sent the letter by recorded post and tracked its delivery on the internet. Still there was no action from Demon.

Several emails later the Demon sales department claimed on 15 July that he had been given a universal licence on 3 June, which was non-refundable. As he had never received this, he demanded to know how he had been given this licence, by whom, and whether there was any proof.

This was never answered. Frustrated he turned to the PC Advisor ConsumerWatch forum in September, where forum regulars pondered his next step. The problem was that though he might well emerge victorious if he pursued his complaint through the small claims track, it would involve a lot of legwork for a comparatively small sum of money.



We contacted Demon which came up with the following response: "We apologise to Mr Krug for the problems he has encountered with his Demon account and will be refunding the Turnpike licence charge immediately. We will be reviewing our processes to make sure that this sort of error doesn't happen again." Sure enough, on 18 September, Demon politely informed our reader he would immediately be refunded the money he paid for the licence.

Who owns what

A PC Advisor reader, who goes by the name of Linz in our ConsumerWatch forum, recently found herself in a strange dilemma. She had experienced difficulties with her Mitsubishi monitor after buying a Mesh PC back in March. Mesh refused a refund so she turned to her credit card company for compensation. Eventually the credit card company coughed up, but then it is legally bound to do so as long as the item costs more than £100.

However, three weeks after receiving compensation from her credit card company, no one had collected the PC. She asked fellow ConsumerWatch forum members: "Who did it now belong to and what should I do,"

We asked the CA (Consumers Association) for some advice. The CA recommended that our reader should write a letter to the credit card company and to the vendor she bought the PC from (copying each one in so they were aware that both parties had received the same

letter). She should inform them that the PC was now available for them to collect. In so doing, their replies should clarify who they perceive to be responsible for the PC and thus determine ownership.

Praise you

The PC Advisor ConsumerWatch forum likes to report on good service as well as uncovering vendor misbehaviour. "Credit where credit is due," we like to say. This month it's a pat on the back for printer manufacturer, Epson.

On Tuesday 13 August, reader Sharon Talbot started to experience problems with her "cheap and cheerful" Epson C20 inkjet printer, which was refusing to let her load it with paper. She rang Epson that afternoon as the printer was still under warranty and the telephone was answered in less than a minute. A member of the support staff proceeded to talk her through resetting the unit.

He quickly came to the conclusion that the printer was faulty and arranged for an exchange, which duly arrived the following afternoon. Unfortunately this brand-new unit was also faulty. It seems that the ink cartridge basket had become detached from the drive belt. Sharon rang Epson and once again the phone was answered promptly by "a very apologetic lady" who arranged for another new unit to be dispatched. It arrived 18 hours later. No trouble, it seems, is too great for Epson's customer services department. "And all for a £50 printer!" exclaimed our happy reader. ■

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](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/consumerwatch)



consumer tips & tricks

Got an unresolved problem with a vendor and unsure what to do next? Get along to our ConsumerWatch forum, ask for some level-headed advice and read about other forum members' experiences. Here's our selection of choice cuts from the online clinic

Q How will I be sure when it is time to take my case to court?

A The answer is: when all other avenues are exhausted. Generally we advise our readers to try every possible alternative course of action to resolve the issue without going to court. Although this can prove incredibly time consuming, we believe in the words Kenny Rogers sang all those years ago: "Sometimes you have to fight to be a man." Read on for advice on where to turn first, without recourse to old country music lyrics.

Q What sort of claims are classified as 'small claims'?

A These are claims for amounts of less than £5,000 and are usually heard in the County Court.

Q Why should I go down the small claims track in the first place?

A The mere threat of being taken to court can often jolt a recalcitrant trader into paying compensation, as it signals the strength of your intent. Also, pursuing traders through the small claims court is easier and cheaper than most people think. The proceedings are held in public and are conducted relatively informally. But be warned, it can take a lot of time.

Q Do I need a lawyer to issue proceedings through the small claims court?

A No. The small claims process has been designed to allow anybody to present his or her own case. However, before going to court you may want to seek the advice of a solicitor.

Q Is there somewhere I can get an in-depth description of small claims proceedings?



A You can get a leaflet outlining the process in full from your local County Court office. They will send you the relevant forms. The process is not technical and you won't need to be fluent in legalese: your name and address, the name and address of the defendant and a brief description of your claim will suffice.

Q Will I have to pay all the costs if I lose my case?

A Generally no. You will only end up having to fork out if the court believes you have unnecessarily brought about these costs by pressing an 'unreasonable' case. This would include making a claim unlikely to stand a chance of winning or failing to make it to the hearing.

Q If I win will I get the full amount of compensation I'm looking for?

A Winning does not necessarily mean that you will get any or all of your money. It is for this reason we recommend you get legal advice before going ahead. It's entirely possible that the defendant's business could have gone belly up and may therefore be unable to pay out.

Q How much are court fees for small claims?

A If you win your case then your opponent will have to pay your court fees. For claims under £200 the cost is £27 in England and Wales. For claims between £400 and £500 you'll have to pay £60 initially but will recover it if you win. Claims from £500 to £1,000 will put you back £80 at first. Finally, claims of between £1,000 and £5,000 will cost you £115.

Q I need to find a local solicitor, preferably one that doesn't charge for initial consultations. Where can I get help with this?

A Try www.justask.org.uk/public/en/directory. This site has a postcode search engine for local solicitors and includes a list detailing the services offered by each practice, along with consultation charges. ■



Got a problem with a vendor? Get yourself to the ConsumerWatch forum at www.pcadvisor.co.uk/consumerwatch

terms & conditions

What's the single biggest reason for disciplinary action in the workplace? Alcohol abuse, theft? The answer is neither – it's internet and email abuse. PC Advisor Forum Editor Peter Thomas investigates



A recent survey conducted by London law firm KLegal and *Personnel Today* magazine put misuse of company email and internet facilities right at the top of the list of disciplinary matters dealt with by human resources departments.

Virtually illegal

Over a 12-month period the survey found that there had been 358 disciplinary cases for online abuse, which was more than the dishonesty, violence and health and safety breaches put together. In a recent study undertaken by the American Computer Security Institute, 91 percent of the companies surveyed reported an internal internet abuse problem. Abuse ranged from slowing the network down by downloading massive MP3 files to playing online games or browsing for pornography.

In the old days it was the theft of paper and bottles of Tippex that gave managers a headache, now it's the wholesale theft of company bandwidth. Employees feel it's their right to use the company internet connection to research their holidays, watch the cricket or discuss at length their plans for the weekend.

Recent surveys carried out in 40 major UK companies by internet security consultant Peapod involved an audit of all

emails sent across corporate networks, and showed that six out of every 10 were unrelated to company business. Private conversations cost millions per year.

Employers are fighting back with technology that enables them to monitor employees' every working moment. For around £1,500 a company can purchase software such as Webspay, which monitors staff email and internet activities. The program sends an instant message to the network administrator whenever a set of predetermined rules is broken. It also analyses email and internet use and produces sophisticated reports on each employee's habits.

Managers can use software to record every keystroke that is made on that person's keyboard. This can all be done remotely and unbeknownst to the employee, although current legislation demands that employees are informed in advance of all 'snooping' activities.

There are risks that go beyond the simple loss of a bit of bandwidth, however. What if an employee sends confidential information to someone in another company? Webspay – and other similar applications – can be told to watch for mail going to certain addresses, or even to look for keywords, and to stop the

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offending messages from ever being sent. This kind of control is becoming routine in small- to medium-sized businesses, but the question remains, how should employees be punished for such actions?

Hard onliners

PC Advisor readers are in no doubt. In a recent poll on our website, 59 percent of respondents thought that employees should be given a formal warning if they surfed porn sites during work hours, while more than a quarter (26 percent) thought they should be fired on the spot. In response to the statement "Bosses are fully entitled to monitor all employee net usage during working hours," over 71 percent said they agreed.

Whatever employees might think, company bosses are taking action. The *Personnel Today* & KLegal survey showed that over 20 percent of all companies now have email and internet monitoring in place, compared to 11 percent 18 months ago. This figure will rise and it looks as though the days of downloading a gigabyte of illegal MP3 tracks on the company broadband connection are numbered. ■



Look out for the latest edition of *Tips & Tricks*, which includes 50 pages dedicated to Windows XP. See page 157 for more information

legal advisor

What is the Data Protection Act and what steps should firms take to ensure they aren't breaking the law? Michael Clinch, senior litigator and partner at law firm Picton and Howell, gives a brief overview and highlights the basic issues that affect businesses

Whenever you collect, save or transfer personal data about an individual you are under a legal obligation to comply with the requirements set out in the Data Protection Act. Failure to do so can be a criminal offence, so if your business relies on the use of personal data you should notify the Information Commissioner and put internal procedures in place to ensure compliance with the act.

Personal data

The Data Protection Act does not apply to company details such as its name and address. However, if your database includes the name of any individual within the firm, this amounts to the processing of personal data and the act applies. Rules are stricter if you process highly sensitive data, including religious belief, racial or ethnic origin or political opinion.

The eight principles

Under the act, personal data must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed,
2. Obtained only for specified and lawful purposes.
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose/purposes for which they are processed.
4. Accurate and kept up to date.
5. Kept for no longer than necessary.
6. Processed in accordance with rights of data subjects.
7. Protected by appropriate technical and organisational measures against



unauthorised or unlawful processing, against accidental loss, destruction or damage.
8. Kept within the EEA unless adequate level of protection for rights and freedoms of data subjects is granted.

Subject access rights

Individuals have the right to see all the data held about them. Businesses must comply but can charge a maximum of £10 for doing so provided they reply within 40 days of payment of the fee.

What you should do

- **Notification** Notify the Information Commissioner that you are processing personal data and renew the notification every year.

- **Internal guidelines and procedures** Review these to make sure that all personnel dealing with personal data are aware of the obligations under the act. Take legal advice or get a lawyer to undertake a data protection audit of your procedures.
- **Website** Make sure that a Privacy Statement is posted online. Alert visitors and ask their consent before processing their personal data. Check to see whether you're using cookies and if they are allowed.
- **Contracts** If you are exporting data outside the EU, make sure you are using Model Clauses in contracts relating to the export of data. These clauses are designed to protect the rights of the individuals whose data is being exported. Failure to use these clauses could result in prosecution. ■

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 data on a PC purchased from the DSG (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



contacts

Where do you turn when things go wrong? There may be an issue with the ad that attracted you in the first place. So if you've been left with a useless piece of kit for which the manufacturer made extravagant claims, it could be worth informing the ASA

The ASA (Advertising Standards Authority) is the governing body responsible for regulating all non-broadcast advertising. Its role is to ensure that all advertisements are 'legal, decent, honest and truthful'. Its regulations cover advertising wherever, and in whatever form (other than radio or television), they appear. The ASA has clarified a series of codes that also governs advertising over the internet.

The codes apply to: online advertising in 'paid for' space (for example, banner and pop-up advertising); advertising in commercial emails and sales promotions wherever they may appear online. The ASA stresses that these codes do not in any way affect your statutory rights under the Data Protection Act. The Distance Selling Directive will provide protection for buying online.

I'm free! (well, nearly)

The ASA produced a report in September 00, which looked at the promises of 'free' web access. What emerged was many of these ISPs actually charged for an element of their services. Deals were heavily



oversubscribed, and many users were disappointed. ASA regulations require advertisers to show that they have anticipated demand, making it clear if stocks are limited and, hopefully, preventing the fiascos of PCs-for-£100 firm from recurring. Where companies have failed to anticipate demand, they will be in breach of the codes.

This aspect of the ASA's code could start the ball rolling against firms that become 'victims of their own success'. Regrettably, this phrase is fast becoming a euphemism for companies whose board members failed miserably to conduct standard business assessments of demand.

Surf yourself silly

The ASA also refused to uphold claims against BT that its ads claiming 'unlimited surfing every weekend with BT Internet' were misleading. The complaint was made because BT kicks customers offline after two hours, whether or not they are downloading or uploading data at the time. This was deemed not to be in contradiction to its claims of 'unlimited surfing' because people can reconnect immediately. That may seem odd, but the ASA tries hard to be fair and regularly upholds complaints made against the big boys.

Making your voice heard

To make a complaint about an advert call 020 7580 5555. Alternatively, fill in the claim form at www.asa.org.uk, via the Contacts icon. All complaints must be made in writing and sent to: Advertising Standards Agency, 2 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HW. ■

Where to turn for help

If the worst happens, it's good to know where to go for help. Here we list some important contacts which can help with a variety of problems from software copyright issues to non-delivery or payment problems.

- Citizens Advice Bureau For general legal advice and to find out your rights. For information, or to find your nearest CAB, call 020 8333 6960 or visit its website at www.nacab.org.uk.
- Consumers Association For advice on all consumer transactions, call 020 7830 6000 or turn your browser to www.which.net.
- Fast (Federation Against Software Theft) Regulators of software copyright law. Clivemont House, 54 Clivemont Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7BZ. Call 01628 622 121 or visit online at www.fast.org.uk.
- Office of Fair Trading OFT, Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London EC4Y 8JX. For general enquiries, telephone 0845 722 4499 or log on to www.ofc.co.uk.
- PC Association Non-profit organisation offering advice to both trade and consumers. You'll find tips on buying safely and a forum for complaining when things go wrong. Turn your browser to www.pcauk.org.