

consumerwatch



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This month PC World is brought to book (not for the first time), forum visitors express their doubts about Microsoft's new Tablet PC operating system and Pipex gets a pat on the back

Once more the mighty PC World has been vanquished by a *PC Advisor* reader armed only with the sword of truth and good old expert advice in plain English.

It all started when Derbyshire-based reader Brian Hutchings bought an Advent computer from PC World, Chesterfield, on 28 September 02. He noticed that the red pigment on the monitor was deteriorating so requested a replacement. PC World duly obliged, but Brian was somewhat miffed when the replacement monitor turned out to be secondhand and only came with a six-month warranty.

The replacement screen was also a bit of an eyesore, clashing badly with the rest of his desktop setup. He complained to PC World's Customer Services who agreed to swap it for an Advent monitor.

He stayed in all day on the specified date but no courier arrived. He phoned again only to be told that he was no longer entitled to an Advent monitor. "This was definitely a case of the left hand not knowing what the right is doing," said Brian.

Confused, he turned to the *PC Advisor* ConsumerWatch forum where we told him to stand firm as he was protected under the Sale of Goods Act (1979).

First, he did not have to accept a secondhand monitor, irrespective of what PC World's 'policy' is. Second, as the retailer, PC World is responsible under law for goods being 'fit for the purpose for which they are sold'. In this case the monitor was not 'fit' – it was faulty.

Third, we informed Brian that he was entitled to a new monitor – one that is identical to (or better than) the one he bought in the first place. This was PC World's responsibility, not the customer's or the manufacturer's.

We gave him our usual advice for dealing with retailers flouting the Sale of Goods Act. He sent a special delivery letter to PC World, stating that he was rejecting the monitor under the terms

of the Sale of Goods Act, that he expected a new one and that he wanted it within seven days or he would reject the rest of the system as well.

Sure enough, three days later on Friday 22 November, he received a letter of apology from the manager of the Chesterfield branch and was offered a new Advent monitor, along with reimbursement of all his telephone and letter costs. Despite

achieving victory, the whole experience still left Brian with a nasty taste in his mouth. "In future I shall shop elsewhere, even if it costs more," he concluded.

Norton's unconditional two-month refunds

Eagle-eyed reader and technical guru in the *PC Advisor* online Helproom forum (www.pcadvisor.co.uk/helproom), Tony Flecchia, was quick to flag up an omission in our January 03 edition.

We reported on the 17-month turmoil experienced by a reader after Norton SystemWorks 2001 failed to agree with his PC. We focused on his battle to claim compensation against the retailer and, after taking our advice, he did indeed achieve victory. However, Tony says we should have pointed out that at the foot of every Norton software package is a clear statement of an unconditional 60-day refund guarantee.

"It's a service I've used and it really is unconditional. You can tear up the box, scratch the installation CD and spill tea over the manual and you'll still get your money back without question, including the VAT," he explains. To claim, simply call the Maidenhead office on 01628 592 222, expressing your dissatisfaction with your purchase.

Poll watch

The portable platform division at Microsoft could soon find itself taking tablets, rather than selling them, if the results of a recent



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




PC Advisor poll

The new Tablet PCs will:


Become the default high end laptop

 (8.6%)

Go the same way as the Apple Newton

 (6.4%)


What's a Tablet PC?

 (31.7%)

Struggle to sell because of high pricing

 (19.9%)

Succeed only in niche markets

 (33.4%)

From a total of 1069 votes

PC Advisor website poll are to be believed. Less than one in 10 respondents (8.6 percent) believe Microsoft will succeed in establishing the tablet PC, which runs the software giant's Windows XP Tablet PC Edition OS, as the de facto high-end notebook standard. With prices up to £2,000 it's easy to see why.

Microsoft has been attempting to position the new device as the natural office successor to the notebook, with its combination of pen-based hand-recognition technology and portrait or landscape

If Noel had asked Dell for a memory chip, floppy drive, processor fan, power supply unit then Dell would have jumped to it. But screws it would seem are not supplied as replacement parts

screen. However, all may not be lost, as around a third (33.4 percent) of respondents believed it would establish itself in niche industries, such as social work, where it could replace hefty piles of paperwork.

Perhaps Microsoft's biggest challenge will be reaching the third (31.7 percent) of respondents who didn't even know what a tablet PC was.

Screw loose

When is a spare part not a spare part? Answer from Dell: when it's a screw. Or so it would appear from the experience of Noel Humphreys whose wife, for the last couple of years, has run a small business from her Dell Inspiron 3800.

It was not a happy laptop in the early years and made several trips back to Dell's factory in Ireland for repair. Eventually, though, it settled into a stable and productive life. Until, that is, one day when Noel noticed two screws missing from the laptop's casing. This made the keyboard wobble, so Noel asked Dell for replacement screws.

Now if Noel had asked Dell for a memory chip, floppy drive, processor fan, power supply unit or any of those things that irritatingly go wrong on a PC then, no doubt, Dell would have jumped to it. But screws it would seem are not supplied as replacement parts because... well, because they don't go wrong.

Noel was passed from department to department in his quest for screws and in exasperation wrote to *PC Advisor*. Thanks to the kind people in Dell's PR department, Noel now has his screws. In fact he has more screws than he needs.

But what we want to know is: how many people haven't? Because if screws are not a spare part then there are no spare screws and someone, somewhere must be going without.

Serving you right

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 pat-on-the-back time for erstwhile bad-boy ISP Pipex.

Pipex made a lot of the early ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) running back in the summer, with a mixture of aggressive pricing and generous promotions. But its sub-£25 monthly service hasn't been without its problems, with hundreds of users experiencing technical difficulties. This, in turn, led to a huge influx of calls to the Pipex support desk, many of which the company was unable to process.

To deal with the hike in phone traffic, Pipex increased its support staff by a third, bringing the total to 90 people. The up-staffing appears to be paying dividends according to *PC Advisor* reader and forum stalwart Ray Cutts.

At the end of November, Ray had cause to request help from Pipex support about an ADSL dialup problem. The phone was answered within 10 seconds and he was swiftly taken through a checking procedure. All was fine at Ray's end, so a 'ticket' was sent to BT to check things at its end. Two hours later he was up and running again. "I am very grateful to both Pipex and BT for their quick responses to my problem," he exclaimed, adding, "I am now one very happy bunny."

Fellow reader and forum star Derek Loader has also noted a distinct improvement. He first signed up to Pipex ADSL in March last year and found that "their telephone customer support was so bad, it was almost non-existent". Derek continued, "It could take well over 30 minutes to speak to someone. We were assured, via this forum, that new advisors were under training and things would improve. Well, they have." ■

Veni, vidi, vendor

Pulling your hair out trying to get hold of a vendor? The *PC Advisor* ConsumerWatch forum can help. We've got several vendors on board, each with their own threads:

Carrera
Dell
E-buyer
Evesham
Mesh
Multivision
Pipex
Rockdirect.com
Time
Watford Electronics

If you're a vendor and would like to set up an official presence email us at pcadvisor_consumerwatch@idg.com.

consumer tips & tricks

The use of pirated and 'under-licensed' software is back in the news, with small business bosses facing up to 10 years for flouting the amended copyright laws. Guy Dixon investigates

Q Why is software piracy back in the news?

A November saw amendments to copyright law that bring stiffer penalties for businesses that are found to be in breach of software licences. Flouting software licensing agreements will be treated like a criminal offence such as theft and fraud rather than breach of contract.

Q How does this help antipiracy bodies like Fast (Federation Against Software Theft) and the BSA (Business Software Alliance)?

A The amended act makes it easier for enforcement bodies to take action. Previously the police had to obtain an arrest warrant or formally request a suspect to come to the station. Police can now march into your office and arrest a company director on the spot if he or she is suspected of using illegal software. The new act also gives more powers to police to confiscate computers or unlicensed materials.

Q In what way is Fast turning up the heat?

A In 2003 Fast will crack down on so-called 'under-licensing', where employees end up using more software than agreed in the licence. Traditionally, antipiracy bodies have relied on settlements: businesses admit flouting the law, pay an agreed sum and apologise. Fast says it will now turn to the criminal law when dealing with investigations.

Q Who exactly is at risk then?

A Any firm that copies software illegally or has users exceeding the number of copies for which they have licences is at risk.



Q How strict are the penalties?

A The amendment increases the maximum prison sentence for criminal copyright infringement from two to 10 years.

Q Who would end up carrying the can?

A Managing directors and bosses in general.

Q What if employees copy or download software then use it illegally without their boss knowing?

A Not good enough. The boss is still personally responsible for staff using illegal software. The growth in the number of employees accessing the internet from their desktops has meant that software environments are now put at considerable risk from the availability of

illegal downloads. Companies that go about their daily business on the back of only partially legal software are putting themselves at great risk.

Q What are bosses doing about it?

A To highlight the issue many businesses are introducing clauses into employee contracts that stipulate that it is employees who should take responsibility for using unlicensed software on their PCs.

Q But why are the authorities targeting small businesses? Haven't they got enough things to worry about?

A Because it's small businesses that are the worst offenders. The BSA, the leading international antipiracy organisation, estimates that around half of all software in use in UK's small businesses is illegal, compared to between 10 and 20 percent in larger companies.

Q I reckon the firm I work for is infringing software licensing laws. What should I do?

A If your company is using unlicensed software and you think your boss could do with spending some time at her majesty's pleasure, call Fast on 01628 622 121 or the BSA on 0800 510 510. You could get more than a warm glow at having done your civic duty. The BSA offers to pay up to £10,000 for successfully concluded cases, though if it's the money you're after you won't be able to make a report anonymously. ■



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

searching for help

The ConsumerWatch forum on the *PC Advisor* website is approaching its 50,000th posting 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, you'll find that a trip to the ConsumerWatch forum is far 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 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

Subjects for discussion | Last response | #

Please ensure that your thread title accurately describes your subject

page - [1] 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ▶

Staples Price
posted by Shinda on Wed, 18.12.2002

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

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

Create new subject for discussion

Title: Please ensure that your thread title accurately describes your subject.

Message: Please note - there is an 800 word limit for messages.

☐ By default you will be notified to email if someone responds to this discussion subject. If you do not want to receive email notifications of new message posts, please uncheck this box.

Begin new subject for discussion [Begin]

Stamping down prices!
posted by Les on Fri, 13.12.2002

3 The posting will instantly appear at the top of the forum threads. When someone responds to your thread, you will automatically be notified by email. If your problem is successfully resolved you are encouraged to click the resolved checkbox. That way other visitors can 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 nearly 50,000 messages sitting in the database, waiting to be sampled. Check on the reputation of a manufacturer or retailer. Alternatively, search for consumer rights issues under a specific term – such as 'credit card' or 'Sale of Goods Act'.

Registered users Area > Discussion forums

Search the discussion archive. Your question may already have been answered!

Search for: Dell AND customer relations

OR

Search thread titles OR AND NOT titles and all postings

☐ Search resolved subjects only

[SEARCH]

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

software AND sale of goods act

ConsumerWatch all discussion [SEARCH]

☐ Search thread titles only ☐ Search titles and all postings

☐ Search resolved subjects only

Dell AND support

ConsumerWatch all discussion [SEARCH]

☒ Search thread titles only ☐ Search titles and all postings

☒ Search resolved subjects only

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 more 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'