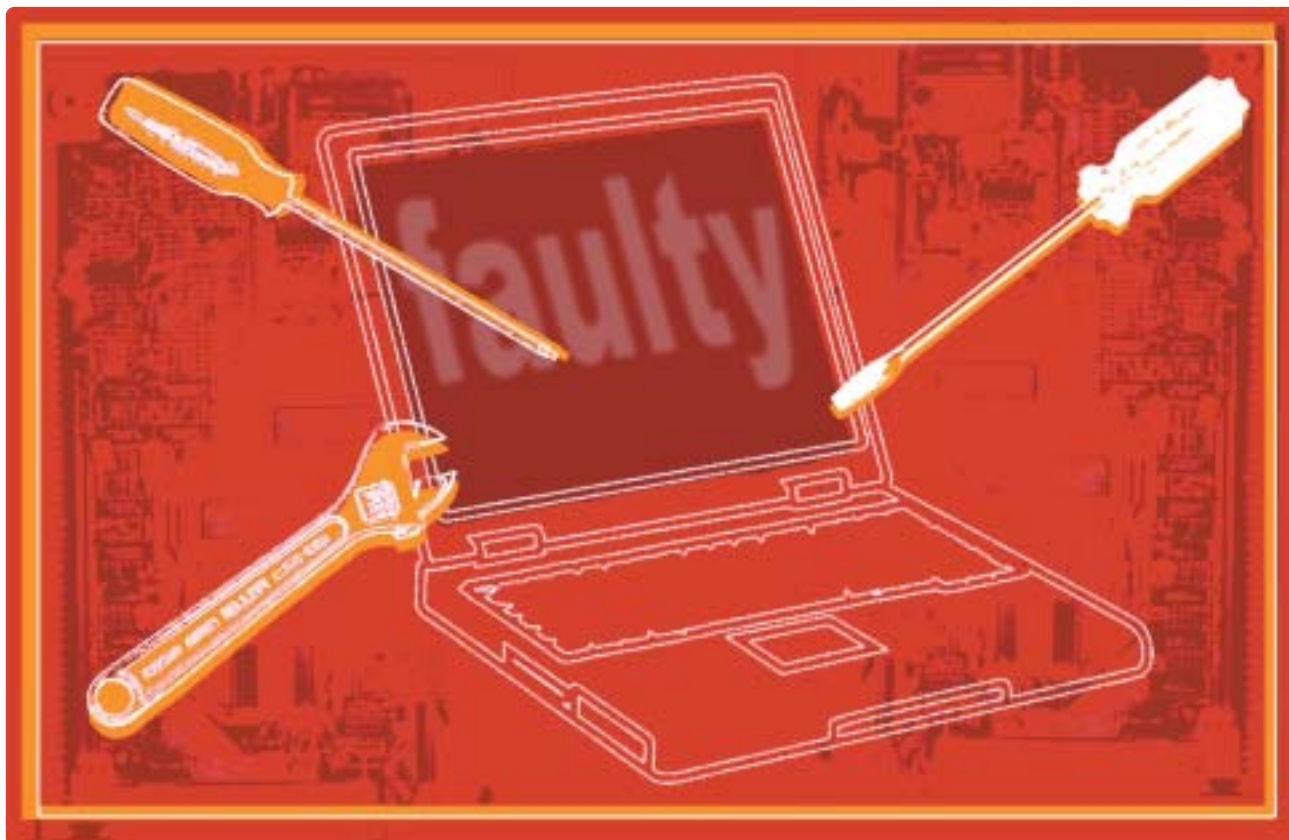


consumerwatch



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Faulty goods and defunct PC makers have been the subject of many an email to the ConsumerWatch inbox this month. We do our best to restore harmony between aggrieved customer and apparently dispassionate retailer while clearing up a little legal confusion



As reported in *PC Advisor's* News section last month, PC maker Campus Systems ceased trading back in May. We have received many calls from concerned customers who have been left with nothing more than an answerphone message telling them the company has been wound up. Till Morris, the company's appointed administrator, has been of little help either, remaining tight-lipped throughout the whole affair.

Off Campus?

Oddly, Campus is still taking orders through its website which now displays the same phone numbers as a company calling itself F3 (www.f3.co.uk). However, there is no mention that this number has changed or even that Campus has ceased trading – to all intents and purposes, it looks like business as usual online.

No one at F3 was able to comment at this stage, although its press officer

did try to smooth things over by passing on what information he could. We deduced that F3 is a reseller, not a manufacturer, even though its website

Since 2000 retailers have been bound by law to rectify any product faults. This legal requirement only extends to the relationship between the retailer and the customer, not the manufacturer and the customer

says that all its systems are built to order. It's all a little confusing.

F3 has a different board of directors to Campus, as required by law, although it has retained many Campus staff in sales positions. Following our conversation, F3 said it would be putting a notice up on the Campus website "within the next 24 hours" to advise customers of the situation. To date this still hasn't happened.

Unfortunately, F3 has not taken on any of Campus' assets, aside from its stock, which means it will not be honouring any Campus orders or warranties. Anyone who paid for a system by credit card but has not yet received their PC should contact their credit card company immediately.

Those unlucky enough to have paid by cash or debit card should send their claim to Till Morris Partnership, 32 Brook Street, Warwick CV34 4BL. We should stress, however, it looks highly unlikely at this stage that customers will get their money

back. The company cannot confirm whether the orders placed through the Campus website after the date of cessation will be honoured by F3.

Repair and mend

The new Sale of Goods Act seems to have caused confusion among certain retailers and customers alike. Many readers often query their right to receive replacement goods and one forum visitor even logged on to ask the best way to deal with faulty goods, while purporting to be an employee of PC World.

Let's clear up the confusion. Since 2000 retailers have been bound by law to rectify any product faults. This legal requirement only extends to the relationship between the retailer and the customer, not the manufacturer and the customer, which is where the confusion starts.

It is still fair and acceptable for the retailer to call on the manufacturer for help repairing its goods, especially where a product is still covered by its original warranty. In certain cases a retailer may recommend the customer takes their product straight back to the manufacturer. In most cases this won't be an attempt to get out of their obligation under the Sale of Goods Act, but simply a quicker option for the customer – in effect cutting out the middle man.

A few months ago we reported that one reader had been advised to take his Iiyama monitor straight back to the manufacturer. At first he was a bit miffed, but in this instance it turned out that the customer received his fixed monitor within days instead of weeks.

Obviously as far as the customer is concerned, the quicker faulty kit is repaired the better. It certainly doesn't hurt to try contacting the manufacturer, rather than the retailer, in the first instance.

We've also received letters from readers who are annoyed that their reseller offers a repair rather than a replacement for non-working goods. Again, a retailer is completely within its rights to do this. The seller must first decide whether in his opinion the product could be fixed before exchanging it.

According to the Sale of Goods Act, providing goods are repaired and returned to the customer "within a reasonable

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

time" then the law is satisfied. It is up to the customer to prove that the time taken was unreasonable.

Dixons dilemma

Forum visitor Brian purchased a Kodak DX3600 Zoom in August 01 from high street retailer Dixons. For added protection he purchased the company's three-year coverplan.

As it happened, Brian's snapper started playing up within the first year of purchase. It was still covered by the manufacturer's warranty so was duly sent to be mended. But some five repair attempts later, Brian's camera still had exactly the same problem.

Dixons promised on the fifth attempt to repair or replace the camera within six weeks. It failed to deliver on that pledge and therefore offered Brian the option of a replacement camera. Unfortunately, the 3600 model had since ceased production and Brian wasn't happy.

Feeling understandably annoyed at having paid for a camera that wasn't fit for the purpose for which it was purchased, he asked us whether he should cancel his finance agreement.

It might sound like a pretty reasonable course of action on Brian's part, however it is important to remember a finance agreement is not made with the reseller but with a separate finance company. Cancelling a plan can result in a bad credit rating and could even see you in court. Generally, as long as you keep up your side of the agreement the law will be on your side.

Instead, we advised Brian to send a letter to Dixons explaining what exactly he

wanted and indeed why he deserved more. Although the reseller is not obliged to offer any additional compensation under the Sale of Goods Act, it never hurts to ask.

The more you moan, the more likely you are to get something extra. After taking our advice, Dixons agreed to refund Brian the £350 he originally paid for the camera back in 2001.

The existing coverplan, which Brian also paid for, has been transferred to his new shooter. In a final conciliatory gesture, Dixon's even offered to loan Brian a camera until his vouchers arrived.

Serving you right

Electronics giant Maplins receives this month's pat on the back for services rendered to *PC Advisor* forum visitor Joe. Upon receipt of an S-Video cable he had ordered from the retailer's online store, Joe was disappointed to find he had selected the wrong product.

He contacted customer services who told him to send the cable back immediately. He did so. Arriving home from work the following day he discovered the promised replacement cable on his doormat. Now that's service.

"I live in Glasgow and the time from me calling Maplins until I received a new cable was 15 hours," said Joe. "This is the fastest reaction to a problem I personally have ever seen." Looks like Maplins is one company that knows the importance of good customer service. ■



Got a problem with a vendor? Log on to the ConsumerWatch forum for instant help and advice www.pcadvisor.co.uk/consumerwatch

fighting for a fat pipe

It's been a month of frustrating delays and unreturned phone calls for *PC Advisor* publisher David Fernando whose only wish was to get cable broadband. Here he chronicles his trials



When he and his family moved to their new home in South London, *PC Advisor* publisher David Fernando was dreaming of a life in the broadband fast lane courtesy of cable firm Telewest. But the installation process was a little more stressful than he'd hoped.

Tuesday 13 May

Contact Telewest to arrange for a telephone, cable TV and broadband package to be fitted at new property on Friday 30 May between 10am and 2pm. Within 20 minutes I receive a text message from Telewest welcoming me as a new customer. A nice touch, but it made me concerned as to what other marketing spam the company may send me.

Thursday 29 May

Arrive at new house to be greeted by a Telewest welcome pack containing

complete details of my account and a reminder – in two places – of the agreed installation time and date.

Friday 30 May

- **2.50pm** Engineer Dave turns up – 50 minutes later than the time agreed – with a crew of two. It appears the cable in front of the house has recently been covered in tarmac and therefore needs to be 'cleared'.

Dave said he had called Telewest about the problem earlier that day and had been informed it had been fixed. There was no evidence of this. It transpires that the engineers have actually 'cleared' a house with a similar address some two miles away.

Monday 2 June

- **10.20am** Having heard nothing from Telewest since Friday, I contact customer services. Spokesman Gareth Jarvis admits that contractors have been unreliable of late and can give no date for when the clearing will now take place. He promises to call back but does not.
- **4.30pm** Contact him again, a little more irritated, and speak to another representative, Mark Coburn, who promises to call me back before 10pm.
- **9.55pm** After tracking down Mark, I am told the department he needs to speak to closed at 8pm and I will now have to wait until tomorrow.

Tuesday 3 June

Ring Telewest, which again has failed on its promise to call me back. Talk to a third spokesperson, Jen, who promises to contact the contractors to resolve the problem. Having heard nothing from Jen all day I phone customer services once more and speak to Gaynor. Gaynor informs me that someone will be out to check the pavement tomorrow and to rearrange an installation date.

On sweeping my front garden, I dislodge a bit of the pavement. It reveals a black tube containing a bright blue cord attached to something underground. A cable? Had it been there all along?

Friday 6 June

Having heard nothing from Telewest for two whole days, I call their main customer care number. They put me through to my local call centre where I speak to Nicky. She says the line should be ready and gives me an installation date of 23 June – that's three weeks later than the date originally agreed.

My call is transferred to customer complaints assistant Debbie who informs me she will speak to the supervisor of installations and get back to me.

An hour later, Debbie calls back to say the installers will "squeeze me in" this weekend, but won't be able to confirm that until Saturday. She also says she'll refund the £25 installation fee.

Saturday 7 June

I call Telewest and are informed that many staff are away sick, so the earliest installation date has now been pushed back to 15 June.

Monday 9 June

PC Advisor contacts the public relations department directly, informing them of the ongoing saga. I receive a call from Emma Lantham, the company's client services director. She says she will call me back today with a resolution and she does. I am offered an installation for the afternoon of Wednesday 11 June.

Wednesday 11 June

Working from home awaiting installation. Receive a call from Emma to check I'm home and advise me that the engineers will arrive at 2pm.

Two senior officers arrive. They say the chief executive's department has requested they oversee the installation. The installation crew arrives late – they had been sitting outside the wrong address – and installed two set-top boxes and my broadband connection.

- **9.40pm** After a further phone call to Telewest to resolve a problem with one of the set-top boxes, my digital woes are finally over and I retire to the loft to check out my broadband connection. Bingo! ■

searching for help

The PC Advisor ConsumerWatch online forum now has more than 60,000 postings primed with comments about customer service and consumer rights. Guy Dixon takes 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

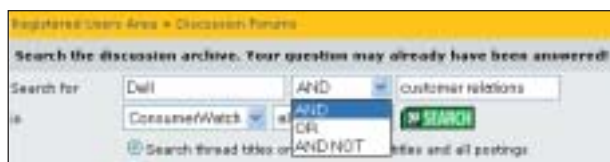


Search facilities

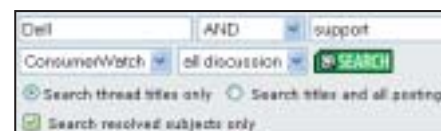
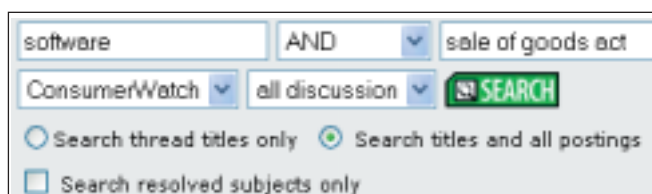
Visitors not only use the ConsumerWatch forum for live help, but also to get background

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'