



Your voice in personal computing

campaign

Complaints this month vary from an ISP that doesn't let you log on, to a two year old PC that's never worked properly. It's not all bad news, however, as Dell gets praise



Frequent visits

Dear PC Plus

Two and a half years ago I bought a PC from Tiny Computers. The cost, including the warranty, was £1,300. When the machine arrived, only the word processor software was working so I rang Tiny to inform it of the problem. Eventually it sent out one of its technicians to correct the problem. He changed a battery and said that it would work OK.

Since then, 13 other PC technicians from Tiny have visited my house over the past two and a half years. Between them, they have changed a significant number of parts – including two battery ports, two hard drives and a motherboard, all of which to no avail.

Tiny then decided to recall the machine, fix any problems and upgrade it to Win98. Even though I was not happy with this and felt that I had given them enough chances to get it right, I agreed as I wanted to get the matter finally over and done with. I have now received the PC back, but I am still not happy with it. What can I do?

Paul McGowan

Polar is, once again, in the dock – although, technically, it hasn't done anything wrong.

Our rely: We rang Tiny and received this statement in reply: "Throughout the last two and a half years, Tiny has endeavoured to please Mr McGowan, but the customer is still not happy. As a goodwill gesture, recently we upgraded his motherboard, upgraded the memory, upgraded the VGA, plus we gave him a new modem and a new hard drive. Additionally, we reloaded the complete operating system and soaked tested his PC for a full 24 hours. This test confirmed that the customer's PC was in perfect working order and then we despatched the PC to Mr McGowan. We have acted upon the terms and conditions of Mr McGowan's warranty at all times and we will continue to do so."

Polar returns

Dear PC Plus

This might have some relevance to the Polar Technology article in Campaign (May 2000 issue).

I ordered a PC from Polar, which was reviewed in PC Plus.

I rang them to find out why it was taking longer than the 14 days that Polar says delivery should take but, to be fair, 28 days is quoted in writing. Polar told me that it couldn't supply the

6x DVD drive and the alternative was to have a 50x CD drive or pay £76 for a 10x DVD. I don't think that a 50x CD drive is worth much more than £35, and it is certainly not the equivalent to a DVD drive. Furthermore, the difference between a 6x and 10x DVD drive isn't £76. I feel like I am being ripped off.

I'm a student and I have more than enough time on my hands to hassle Polar about this until the cows come home, especially using its free 0800 number. I can only think that Polar Technology has made some grave mistakes with its pricing and now it is trying every trick in the book to minimise the damage.

Adam Palfreyman

Our rely: Polar Technology replies: "We quoted up to 28 days for delivery because of world-wide DVD shortages. Any 6x DVD drives that come into stock are allocated to machines on a first come, first served basis. The customer called asking if we could speed up the delivery of his PC. We offered to change his system to a CD drive at a discounted price if he needed to get his system sooner. Mr Palfreyman was not forced to accept this deal and this was made clear to him."

"We have now shipped this PC (some six or seven days early) with an originally specified DVD drive. The customer has been informed and now seems happy."

Internet chaos

Dear PC Plus

I recently signed up with an ISP called Strayduck. You may have heard of it as, interestingly, you get one third of your Internet calls for free. In the first two weeks there were some delays when logging on:

sometimes it would take three or four attempts to connect. Oh well, I thought, it's a new company and it'll probably get better. In the third week, I started using the company's 0800 number as instructed. Every time it connected perfectly. Good, I thought, it's fixed.

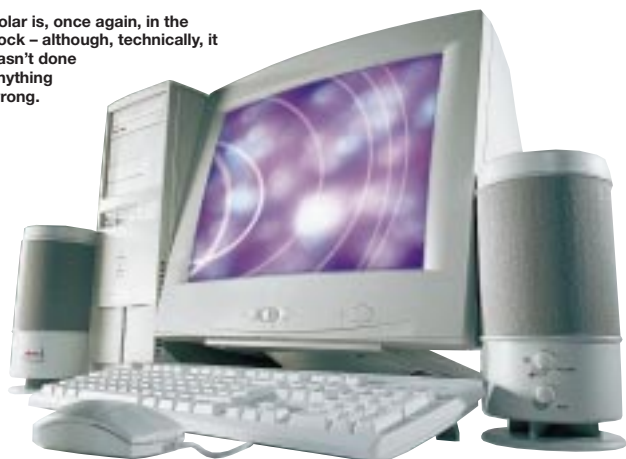
I was proved wrong, though. When my quota of special rate calls was up, I had to go back to the 0845 number. I encountered the same problems that I had before! This was whilst using Strayduck's ISP connection software. I then attempted to connect with Window's dial-up networking tool and, yes, everything worked fine.

Now this could just be coincidence, but is Strayduck having massive technical problems? I feel that it is trying to force its diallers not to connect, except to use up their free minutes, which it probably wants people to use up as soon as possible!

Peter Rucker

Our rely: We spoke to Strayduck, it says: "We have recently undertaken significant investment in our network infrastructure to improve its customer connections and overall service stability. We are aware that prior to these developments, certain Strayduck customers may have experienced some difficulties in connecting during peak times."

"We would also like to emphasise that our service should only be accessed from the duck icon on the user's desktop. This allows users to access our dialler technology, which then calculates the 0800 minutes entitlement. It benefits neither the user nor ourselves to prevent access to the 0845 number and with the recent investment in the network, such difficulties should not occur."



**Dear PC Plus**

I am a very recent addition to the PC world and I have only just started taking your excellent magazine. Many letters that you covered recently have concerned Time Computers. I bought my own PC from Time – it's a standard package: a 500-3D CD-R Time machine, which I feel is a fairly good computer.

My problem is that after a few weeks of getting to know my computer and making many, many mistakes along the way (including a few crashes), I decided to return it to its 'out of the box' condition. This involved using the recovery disk that I had made when I first started using the PC (which I had used several times previously with no problems), together with the Reload\Backup CD supplied. Having followed all the instructions given, I duly restarted my machine with the disk in my floppy drive.

Next I chose option 6, Restore Master Image. I inserted the Reload\Backup CD and settled down whilst the Norton Ghost program did its work. I thought that this procedure would conclude in my computer, and return it to the same state it was in when I first switched it on. Oh how naive I was.

The first change that I noticed was a different boot-up procedure, which did not offer the games or normal Windows options. Although Windows started normally, I had a Network Neighbourhood Icon on the desktop so I re-booted in the hope that this was a glitch. I had no such luck. Additionally, during this reboot I also noticed that the Norton Virus scan had reported 'Label not found'.

I then decided to use the recovery disk again to reset my system again, going through each option. All of my chosen options worked, except option 3, Restore Autoexec and Config sys. This reported 'access denied' to the config sys file. Now, as a novice,

this meant nothing to me and I tried for about a week to rectify the problems. I had absolutely no luck at all. So, in the end I had to contact the Time Support line, which took four days of constant ringing to get through. The young man who helped me was very good and a single suggestion, which was make the config.sys file un-hidden, solved most of my problems – but not my Network icon complaint. Eventually, I managed to get it off the screen.

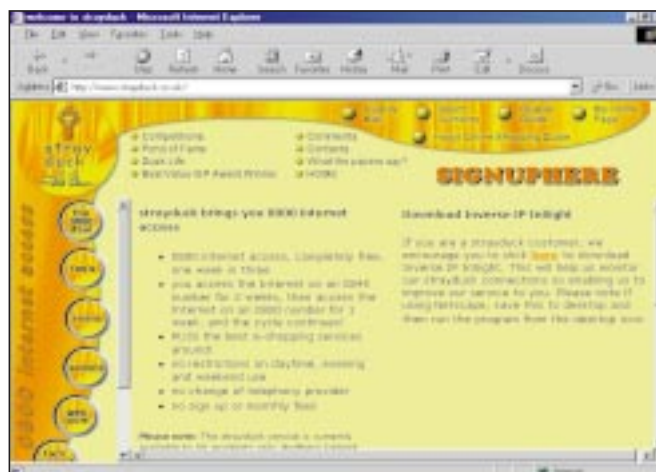
My complaint is that as a new user, surely the information given from Tiny should be correct. Its reboot procedure did not return my machine to its 'out of the box' condition as implied. I wouldn't have had to spend money on an expensive premium rate phone call to rectify my problem if the instructions did as promised on the box. I don't know if other manufacturers have the same faults but, on behalf of other new users, I hope not, as there could be a lot of profit being made from premium rate phone calls, trying to fix things that the manufacturer gets wrong.

M Ritchie

Our rely: A Time spokesman says: "From in the customer history file, which details all contacts with Mr Ritchie, it would appear that he had corrupted several system files on his hard disk. Our help-line staff subsequently worked closely with him to help remedy the problem."

The spokesman added: "Mr Ritchie, in fact expressed his satisfaction with the support that he had received and said that he would e-mail a message of thanks to the staff concerned. No further contact was made but if Mr Ritchie had identified that the problem still existed as a matter of courtesy Time would have automatically replaced the recovery disc and reload CD." Furthermore, Time Computers commented that the cost of phoning the support line was, in its view, entirely fair as calls were charged only at the normal national rate.

It just goes to show that a company as large as Dell can still retain the level of personal service



Strayduck offers its users free phone time, but is it blocking its use on purpose? One reader thinks so...

AND FINALLY**Well done Dell!**

We have many letters and e-mails from unhappy readers, but it's not all doom and gloom. Here is a cheering story from a customer who is actually happy with the level of customer support that he has received

Dear PC Plus

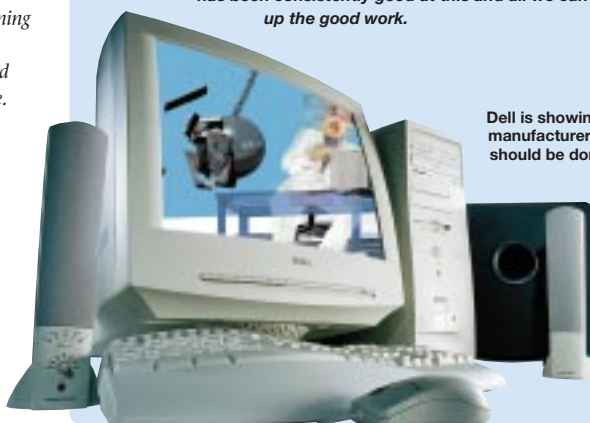
I bought a Dell Dimension XPS M200 three years ago and, at the same time, upgraded the warranty to three years. After almost three years of constant daily use without the slightest hiccup, I received the dreaded 'blue screen of death' a few days ago and it looked bad!

After running some diagnostics and a bit of detective work, I discovered that one of the two memory DIMMs had failed. I checked my warranty and discovered that it had only two days left before it expired. I telephoned Dell technical support and was put through immediately (yes, I did say immediately) to an extremely helpful support engineer. He talked me through some tests to verify that it was, indeed, the memory chip that had failed and checked his records to find that the warranty was still valid... just. I indicated that I was comfortable installing the DIMM module myself and it was agreed that a replacement board would be dispatched for next day delivery. The chip arrived exactly as promised and, within minutes, my machine was back in the land of the living.

This is actually the second time I have used Dell's excellent service (I have another Dell at home) and it was as true to its word on that occasion as well. It just goes to show that a company as large as Dell can still retain the level of personal service that many computer companies are sadly failing to deliver.

John G Hinckley

Our rely: Isn't it nice when people say great things about a computer manufacturer's customer service, instead of complaining about it? Dell has been consistently good at this and all we can say is: keep up the good work.



Dell is showing other PC manufacturers how it should be done.