Major products are being hampered by an inability to take on board criticism, says Barry Fox.

Listen up, stupid

In some industries top management read the specialist press to find out what their middle managers don't know or don't dare tell them. They insist on trying what they sell, fresh from the box. And they are grateful when outsiders like me report problems.

For some time now I've been trying to get the message across to Psion regarding connectivity and data transfer difficulties with the Series 5. When I write about these problems, I often prompt readers to tell me how they have hit similar problems when using the Series 5 and PsiWin software. They ask whether the new Series 5mx is any better. Sorry, but I have no idea.

I had given Psion half my working day to visit and demonstrate the data transfer problems I had been trying to explain. Psion promised that there would be a new fix version of PsiWin. But I've never seen it.

In June, Psion held a press briefing to unveil a new range and introduce a new CEO, David Levin. Along with other journalists, I didn't get an invite. Instead we got a note telling us that 'due to the size of the venue' we couldn't attend.

If you are interested in keeping customers happy, Mr Levin, don't rely on middle managers to tell you what's what.

Several readers have asked if it is now safe to buy Lost & Found from Powerquest, which is claimed to recover deleted or damaged files. Again I don't know. The first version had such powerful copy-protection, to lock a master floppy to one PC, that some PCs could not load it all. I wasted time and hard cash fitting a new floppy drive because Powerquest techies said mine must be faulty. It wasn't.

I later tried the original software on a new Pentium III and the DOS install procedure locked up until I ran it under the Win 98 Safe DOS option. Powerquest has said it is scrapping the one-PC restriction. Despite a reminder, they never sent me a copy to try. So my advice has to be, don't risk it.

I'm also finding that existing Compuserve software isn't working properly with Windows 98. Instead of auto-disconnecting from the phone line, the PC gives a 'TAPISRV running' error message and stays on the line running up charges. The answer is to use Version 4 which was written especially for Windows 98.

Version 4 can 'restore' mail messages deleted by mistake. But at the same time it searches out all emails previously successfully sent and stacks them up for re-sending. I only found out when I went online and saw my PC sending several hundred emails to people who are now questioning my sanity.

Microsoft launched Microsoft Office 2000 with a party. Those who paid £600 for a full copy may wish Microsoft had spent the party money on checking the software before sale. Installing Disc 2 threw up a string of disconcerting error messages. 'File CRSWPP.DLL on Web Publishing Wizard Disc cannot be found'. Then the same for FLUPL.HLP, FLUPL.OCX and a dozen more.

Yes, says Microsoft, we have found this happens when people are using some US Robotics/3Com modems. The trick is to shut down the PC, re-start and choose the Disc 2 installation 'Repair' option. USR/3Com is one of the most widely sold modem brands. How on Earth could Microsoft have missed such an obvious bug?

I really hoped that the new Encyclopaedia Britannica CD and DVD-ROMs would give Microsoft's Encarta a serious competitor. Both provide links with the internet

> Those who paid £600 for a full copy may wish **MICROSOFT HAD SPENT THE PARTY MONEY** on checking the software before sale

to update information from the disc. But using Encarta is a lot easier, while EB is a frightful mish-mash of product options and registration obligations and opportunities.

There's Britannica CD Multimedia, CD Standard, DVD International and two web sites. Britannica Online costs an annual subscription, after 30 days free trial. The other is free for updating links. But each involves a registration obstacle course and EB holds two different user databases. Going online from the DVD to update throws up a choice of three CD-ROM options with no mention of DVD. And so it goes on.

Encyclopaedia Britannica's UK MD now says the company recognises it is unsatisfactory to have two separate registration databases and is now looking to combine them. Perhaps at the same time EB's top management could take home copies of Encarta, give them and copies of EB to their next door neighbours, and watch while they try and install them on a PC.

100131.201@compuserve.com