

# letters

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## BILL'S BASIC MISTAKE

Have I read this wrong (Microsoft fights piracy by withholding media, PCW January 2000, page 24)? Surely it's not 1 April yet. I always thought that the requirement for original discs to be supplied with a new computer was so basic that everyone took it for granted. Obviously it's something that Microsoft finds it convenient to forget about (along with decent manuals, but that's another story).

I'm not a computer novice by any means but there have been innumerable occasions when I've had to go back to the original discs: something I've installed has corrupted something else; the machine has crashed and corrupted something; I've uninstalled something I thought I wouldn't need and found I did; I've decided to have a clear-out of all the clutter left by dead programs so have reformatted the hard drive and done a fresh install; I've bought a new hard drive and decided to start from scratch with a fresh install.

My current machine came with a Microsoft Windows 95 CD together with a system recovery CD and disk from the

manufacturer. Obviously the system recovery option is OK, but I've always been glad of (and preferred) the Microsoft Windows 95 CD. As for the idea of a 'BIOS-locked recovery disk' what about BIOS upgrades, viruses etc? Obviously these are not something we all encounter every day, but they're not exactly unheard of.

**ROBERT STUBBS**

## WHAT NO MEDIA?

So now, when we buy a PC with a Windows OS, we won't get a copy of the OS on a disc as part of the bundle. If that's what 'discontinuing media as part of required deliverables' means.

The vague offer of a BIOS-locked recovery disc, which only works with a BIOS carrying the vendor's ID, shows how little Microsoft cares or understands.

Operating systems, even those from Microsoft, quite often outlast the hardware. So what happens when I change my PC? Microsoft seems to be denying me the freedom to remove the OS from the old machine, and install it on the new one.

What happens when I change the

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### AOL'S HIDDEN COSTS

Readers might like to know about a back-door increase in charges for AOL's 0800 access plan. [Instead of charging for telephone calls to a LoCall number, this plan offers access at 1p a minute.]

While I generally welcome the thrust of this plan, it has a problem. If you also access AOL via TCP/IP [through a company network, for example], as I need to do from time to time, you are charged 1p per minute. When I was previously on the LoCall number access plan, TCP/IP access was offered at no additional charge – as it should be because I am paying my subscription fees for AOL access.

AOL does post a dialog box on the

subject of connecting via TCP/IP, but its thrust is more 'look at the great opportunity you are missing to connect via the 0800 number', rather than 'WARNING: despite being connected via TCP/IP you are still being charged 1p per minute'.

Indeed, AOL also states under keyword PRICING 'While you are connected to AOL on our 0800 access number, no charges will appear on your phone bill. Instead your AOL account will be billed at a rate of 1p per minute, allowing you to connect at less than local call rates, 24 hours a day.'

This implies that the 1p a minute charge will only apply while you are connected under the 0800 number.

I have written twice to AOL on this subject; the first response merely restated the issue rather than explaining and clarifying it; the second suggested that 'In relation to this particular query, can I please ask that you contact our customer services department... and we will gladly assist you in setting up a direct debit.' No, I didn't get the connection there either!

AOL is claiming to be at the forefront of the campaign to lower Internet access costs and obtain 'flat rate' access charges. But then it goes and raises the cost for those accessing by a 'flat rate' means!

**BOB GEORGE**

motherboard? Must I buy that from the original vendor, so it has the right ID? What happens if that vendor doesn't sell motherboards, or goes bust? How do we get the old ID onto the new motherboard?

Vendors are apparently unhappy about the plan, pointing out that reducing the availability of 'media' is quite likely to increase the incidence of piracy.

Nor will they be very thrilled when people like me start ordering PCs without Windows pre-installed, and demanding the appropriate reduction in price. We can either move our old Windows OS onto our new machine, or buy a separate copy of the OS on 'media'.

Microsoft attempts to justify its partly-baked proposal, with the completely eccentric argument that software piracy costs jobs, increases taxes and finances the drug trade. The implication that Microsoft can do anything to reduce unemployment, lower taxes and fight drug trafficking is stretching things, to say the least. That it proposes to bring us these benefits by reducing the availability of its software is at best ironic, at worst an indication of how very ill they have all become.

**ROGER CAREY**

### APPLE'S LURID LEGACY

I wish Steve Jobs a long, healthy and prosperous life. But, when the time eventually comes for him to relocate to the 'Great Backup in the Sky', I hope he makes the journey in a translucent purple coffin for what he's unleashed upon the world.

OK, beige is boring, but have you walked around a PC retailer lately? Translucent printers, scanners, monitors, mice – even waste bins and plant-pot holders! Too much, too much! And what do these things look like when they've sucked in a bit of dust and gathered a few scratches?

**IAN BARNES**

### WILL HEAD replies >

*While we fully agree that the current crop of multicoloured PCs is a little hard on the eyes, it is hardly fair to blame Apple. The iMac is wonderfully designed and puts the beige box fraternity to shame, but the reason it works so well is that all its components are designed by Apple and as a result they co-ordinate. The PC industry was founded on the basis that you could choose your bits from a number of manufacturers and put together the best system for your needs. This worked fine*

*when everything was dirty white, but now we are experiencing the downside of this advantage – severe colour clash.*

*We've seen a few 'EasyPCs' recently and early indications would show that if anything in the PC domain can carry off the colours it will be these. As they are sold as sealed boxes there is less scope for adding bits that don't match. Hopefully, over time the style-conscious consumer will opt for the fun and friendly 'EasyPC' while those who want bang for their bucks can choose a powerful upgradeable system that doesn't look too much like a mismatched eyesore.*



### GOT ANY CHANGE?

PCW is normally at the forefront of technological changes and usually ready to adopt or try out the latest new thing. So how come the latest phone number change seems to have escaped unnoticed? I know you've mentioned it in your news and reviews but the magazine hasn't adopted any. The letters page itself says 'Send your letters to... or fax 0171 316 9313'. Surely by now this should be 020 7316 9313. Page 10 (January 2000 issue) includes lots more examples.

But what happens when your advertisers try to do the right thing? One supplier's ad says phone 'Sales 0208 xxx xxxx'. I'm sure this should be written 020 8xxx xxxx. Inside London you can skip the 020 prefix but you will need to add the 8 or you won't make the call.

Come 1 April, everybody will have to be getting it right.

**ROD M MAIN**

### WILL HEAD replies >

*Due to the way the number change has been (mis)managed there is no ideal time to switch over to the new numbers. Until autumn 2000 (specific dates depend on the actual code) you can use either the new codes with the new numbers or the old codes with the old numbers. However, the new local numbers on their own do not come into effect*

*until 22 April (at approximately 1am). Although it is correct to present the number as 020 7316 9000, it is slightly misleading since dialling 7316 9000 in Central London before the 22 April will connect you to the wrong number (731 6900 if it exists). If you want to play safe then you should ideally change all numbers at 1am on the 22 April, but this isn't a viable option for most businesses. For more information on the intricacies of this problem see [www.numberchange.org](http://www.numberchange.org).*

### DOWNSIDE OF DOWNLOADS

I am currently working in Bangladesh, where Internet access speeds are slow (typically 10-40KB/min). Can I make a plea for websites with simple content that downloads quickly?

I have found many websites impossibly slow to browse from here because the graphics content is so great that a single page can take five minutes to download. I suspect many site designers are unaware of this problem. Anyone hoping to attract a wider audience needs to keep page size in mind. I suspect part of the blame lies with the website design software, which makes it easy to generate complex pages. Your review of website design packages in the December 1999 issue gives no clues as to whether some packages create bulkier pages than others.

**JOHN RATSEY**

### SERVICE WITH A SMILE

I recently purchased a 17in CTX monitor. When I installed it on my computer I found that it was impossible for me to obtain a straight top or sides to the desktop. I tried all of the controls to no avail. There was another problem, in that the plastic edging around the screen was out of alignment.

I telephoned CTX at Watford to explain my difficulties. I spoke to a very helpful lady who decided that the best idea was to replace the monitor. She told me the exchange would take place on the following Tuesday morning (three days later). At 9am on the specified day the exchange was made.

A great deal of your correspondence relates to bad service from suppliers and manufacturers in the computer industry. I therefore felt that it would be right to publicise an example of excellent service. As a result I am writing to you in the hope that others may realise all is not lost and some companies will look after their customers.

**GEORGE FARMER**