

PC repair - At my home or should I take it in?

When your home PC has decided to opt for early retirement it is usually a madly infuriating situation. You may spend hours trying to figure out what you did wrong. Was it the kick for shutting down without asking? Was it the right jab for asking if you want to shut down when you've just told it to? It was probably neither but inevitably it's time to call in the experts. The question is who and how?

Usually the key questions is whether to call the PC doctor round or whether to unplug everything and take it back to it's birthplace or some other computer hospital on the high street.

Many people think of the PC in much the same way as the family car. They have a garage that they trust and similarly they have a PC shop they trust. But your car is mobile and if the garage hasn't repaired the problem you will know right away. Not so with PC's.

My parents recently took their PC to a repair shop. Unfortunately I wasn't in the country at the time to fix it for them. After 2 weeks the PC was ready along with the \$150 bill for replacing the motherboard. When they took it home and assembled it they were quite dismayed to find it still didn't work. After a one day of swapping connectors and calling back to the repairers they got it working. This seems all too common a problem. Many times the fault is incorrectly diagnosed at the shop because the PC fixer only receives the dead box. Changes are made to settings and outputs that are not explained to the customer. When the customer puts it all back together at home all those wires look so similar and they end up in the wrong slot. Next, the PC goes back to the shop where the PC fixer and the customer have an argument regarding the "working" properties of the PC.

In contrast if you call a PC doctor to your house you can talk them through the problem. More importantly they can talk you through the solution and there is no disconnecting of wires and getting covered in dust. The only down side is in trusting a stranger in your home. Luckily almost all PC geeks don't have a dishonest bone in their body and they make enough money to ever be involved in any scams. Most people can judge character over the phone. Ask your friends who they would recommend. Be sure to get an estimate of the total cost for the job within the first 10 minutes of the PC doctor arriving at your house. If they won't commit show them the door.

Speed wise it's almost always quicker to get someone in. Many would argue that the repair shop will be quicker as it stocks the parts. If new parts are required there are so many variables these days that the repair shop is likely to order them in just like the roving PC doctor. Also, the price of parts is changing on a daily basis. It's in no one's interest to carry a large stock of parts.

Furthermore when the PC repair shop tells you that you are "top priority" be under no illusion that this really means "in the pile with everything else". The great benefit of calling someone in is that you know they are working flat out on your problem. You can watch them. If for some weird reason they don't like to be watched then show them the door. The whole point is that you can see what is going on.

How do I know all this? I've worked on both sides of the fence. I currently work as a roving PC doctor in Vancouver, BC but have worked part time in PC repair shops. For the reasons outlined

above I wanted to work at people's homes. It's a great feeling when you can walk into someone's home, look at a problem that been driving someone nuts and have it fixed in 20 minutes.

Not all problems are fixable in 20 minutes. I know I might be biased but at least if you have someone round to your house they can show you exactly why it will take longer. If it's at the shop who knows how long the work took and if they used some old parts they had lying around! Happy computing!

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