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Lyons' Den

CompUSA, How Could You?

by Daniel J. Lyons

I have a friend that is looking into purchasing a new iMac DV in the next few months, so I took her out computer shopping this past weekend. The day went well and she was excited about the capabilities of the new iMacs, but then we made the mistake of shopping at CompUSA.

For a little background on the situation, my friend is currently using a leftover Pentium 100 from her office. It's kind of slow, non-Y2K compliant and came with a mouse cunningly shaped like a brick. Because of its odd shape and unresponsive buttons it was driving her and her roommates crazy. So, we decided to get her a new mouse that would not only work with her current computer, but also with her iMac once she gets it. After testing out all of the available mice at CompUSA in Brighton and MicroCenter in Cambridge (both on the



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Boston, MA area), she decided on the Kensington Scrolling Mouse in a Box.

The new Kensington mice come with a USB to PS/2 adapter to allow for both Windows and Mac compatibility and I've had great luck with their mice in the past. One of the best things about the Kensington mice is the MouseWorks software that is bundled with them. MouseWorks is a great program that shows you a picture of your mouse with large, easy to read, drop down menus to program each button. You also have the option to create button sets for different applications, which can come in very handy. MouseWorks also gives you the option of setting a command to be sent when you press two buttons simultaneously, my favorite being the save command.

Unfortunately for us, MicroCenter was out of the mouse she wanted, so we returned to CompUSA to purchase it. The cashier mumbled something to my friend about a replacement warranty for \$5 and she said sure. Realizing that the Kensington mice have a five-year warranty I told the cashier to stop so that we could review the plan that she wanted to sell us. She ignored us, finished the transaction then handed my

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friend the credit receipt. Unable to answer our questions about the plan she had just sold, she called over the Front End Manager and I asked her what benefits this plan offers above Kensington's five-year warranty. She told us that the replacement plan covers the first year of the warranty and if the mouse stopped working in that time it could be brought back to CompUSA for replacement.

My friend didn't see the point of paying for an extra warranty that would expire long before the manufacturer's warranty that comes with the product. Because of this, my friend requested that the plan be removed from her purchase. We were then informed by the Front End manager that, despite the fact that the credit receipt was not signed and the purchase had never been approved by the card holder, there was no way for them to cancel it out of their new system. She told us that the only way to correct the mistake was for us to go to Customer Service to request a refund for the service plan. As if that wasn't enough to sour the shopping trip, the Customer Service rep informed us that the warranty did not cover the first year, as we were told, rather it would come into effect after Kensington's warranty expired. It seems

that even management doesn't know what's going on.

Without learning their new point of sale system, I don't know if they were just being lazy and not bothering to conduct a simple void or if their software truly is so poorly written that it cannot void a transaction. Either way, CompUSA has a problem. I am amazed that any company would even consider forcing their customers to fix mistakes made by their employees, especially when their employees are so poorly trained. It's bad enough that, except for one dedicated individual and the local Apple Rep, everyone working at this store tries to pretend that the Mac section doesn't exist. At one point earlier this year, half of the Mac software shelf was covered by a large stack of VCRs that they were giving away with the purchase of a complete computer system (Mac systems not included, of course).

My concern is that, as Apple's primary national retail partner, CompUSA may be doing more damage to the platform than it would if they simply didn't sell Macs. If CompUSA cares so little for their customers, and for their Mac buying customers especially, perhaps it is time for us to take our business

elsewhere. In 2000, I will be purchasing a G4 and helping my friend to buy her iMac, I also have several friends considering new computers in the new year. After this weekend, I doubt that any of them will be purchased at CompUSA.

Do you faint and don't know why?

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