

33 Fisher Street
Natick, Massachusetts
2005 December 20

Apple Computer Inc.
1 Infinite Loop
Cupertino, CA 95014

Dear Apple Computer,

Failing to tell your customers about third-party repair under warranty must be losing you business. I was less than two weeks away from giving up on Apple forever.

This is not a letter of complaint. My problem has been resolved. This is a letter of constructive criticism.

The power input inside my iBook G4 had a ridiculously loose connection that required twisting, turning, pushing, pulling, and angling the power plug until the laptop would deign to take electricity from it. Still under the basic one-year warranty, I called the Apple Store in Newton's Chestnut Hill Mall that had (eventually) taken care of the dysfunctional hard drive the laptop had come with. I managed to get someone to speak to me only because I had signed up for an in-person appointment on-line (I was trying to check the wait time, not sign up, incidentally). I also called Apple Customer Service; the second time I finagled my way over to a tech support person (the lack of *any* phone support either at stores or nationally is another issue).

Every person I talked to told me that the problem would be fixed under warranty but it would have to be sent out to Apple's own labs, a two-week process. I rely on my laptop for work and volunteer duties and this was unacceptable. I asked if buying AppleCare would change this. I was, in fact, begging people to give me some reason to buy AppleCare, to make some accommodation so I could get the laptop fixed in-state. (The Chestnut Hill store actually had done this, replacing my hard drive when the labs, claiming nothing was broken, sent back my unrepaired laptop direct to me two weeks after Chestnut Hill sent it in.)

My point was, I had received such terrible service, costing me many, many hours of my time, why would I want to pay for two more years of it? No one I talked to, tech support and customer service both at the Chestnut Hill store and the national phone line, would give me any way at all to get the repair done in an acceptable time. I explicitly asked if there was any place I could take it to have it fixed. I asked the Chestnut Hill store if they could order the part and install it, as they had the hard drive. I asked the last person I talked to please put that in my file as the way to make me happy: find a way to get the computer fixed in Massachusetts.

With a two-week repair process simply not a viable solution for me, I was planning to argue one more time at the Apple Store in Chestnut Hill Mall. Failing that, I would have skipped my chance to get the (apparently useless) AppleCare protection plan, attempt to fix power input port with pliers, and then using my iBook until it broke. At that point, if it were too expensive to fix

at a local computer repair place, I would have bought an Acer laptop and learned Linux, as I would have if friends and colleagues hadn't gotten me to try Mac. Do you understand how close you were to losing a customer who will buy thousands of dollars of Apple products, and perhaps influence the buying of tens of thousands of dollars, over my lifetime? It was journalists and editors and volunteers involved in the Narco News Bulletin project that convinced me to get a Mac. As the acting coordinator for the Fund for Authentic Journalism that supports this project, I am now be in a position to give advice to the reporters and editors to whom I would then write checks or wire money for the purchase of computers, as my predecessor has done – all for Macs – on three occasions.

It was Andrew Grice, the founder of the Fund for Authentic Journalism, who was one of the people who talked me into getting a Mac in the first place, suggested I take it to an Apple-certified repair place, and from his home in New York City he did a Google search for me to find one in my area, Organize-It in Boston.

Tom Roberts of Organize-It had my iBook fixed overnight for no extra charge, put the rubber feet I'd been missing for months back on, and tightened up other things he said would have caused problems down the line (routine maintenance of a sort that I get with my digital camera, which I would recommend incorporating into AppleCare).

I went from a terminally unhappy customer to a perfectly satisfied customer, thanks to third-party support.

The important point I am trying to spell out for everyone at Apple in excruciating detail is that the bizarre failure to tell me 'go to such-and-such a place and they'll bill Apple under warranty' nearly lost a customer for life. This convenience (and dare I say quality) of third-party support that Apple offers was kept a secret from me by everyone at Apple. In effect, your customer service representatives lied to me, out of ignorance, apathy, or company policy. I don't appreciate that in any instance, and this took away still more hours from my life that I will never get back and many cycles of my battery as it drew itself down when I couldn't get the laptop to take a charge. I would appreciate a new battery, or a discount on a new battery, as a way to make this customer whole again. Actually I'd prefer a gift to the Fund for Authentic Journalism, if Apple donates to non-profit causes at all. But the real point of this letter is to ensure that Apple tells the next Mac newbie about third-party support under warranty/AppleCare before she or he quits Apple forever.

I do have one question for which I would like an answer. Does an apparent company policy *against* informing customers of third-party under-warranty support mean Apple is trying to phase out third-party support? I find this impossible to believe, because sending one's computer for a two-week vacation to Apple labs cannot be a solution for anyone who really uses their computer, but... Please let me know. I'm already buying AppleCare of course, but the availability of third-party support will influence my buying decisions in the future.

I include the information for Organize-It so Apple stores in Massachusetts and customer service over the phone have at least one place to send customers whose repair or service needs can't be

met at the Apple stores. The important thing is just to let people know that third-party support is available under warranty and AppleCare, and the first step to that would seem to be letting your employees know.

The contact information and address for Organize-It Apple Service Boston:

<http://organize-it.com/>
617-734-7240
organize@Organize-it.com
144 Smith Street
Boston, MA 02120
617-734-7240

Just this morning a friend taken with my iBook asked for my advice. I recommended Apple—conditional on the availability of third-party support under Apple’s protection plan. Please tell me this support will stay in place, and Apple Store locations will be informed that they should inform customers of the option— at least after we get upset.

Thank you,

Benjamin Melançon