

Editorial

John Mitchell

A letter from the cable company ntl arrived this week. The opening paragraph read "You may have noticed that since the beginning of September there have been some delays getting through to our Customer Service teams. This is because we've started a programme of service improvements to help us give you a better level of customer service next year". Yeah, right. They degrade the service while improving it! When will these clowns learn that any service improvement programme should not degrade what is already a very poor service. They also forgot to mention that they were half way through their improvement programme and had only succeeded in making things worse. True successors to BT!

I wanted to renew my subscription to PC World so I called their "telephone hotline" only to be told that they were doing "maintenance" on their database and could I call back in a couple of days? Whoever heard of doing maintenance during the working day? I am feeling like one of the grumpy old men in that TV programme, so I will just finish up with one of my perennial favourites at this time of the year, the J Sainsbury's so called "store locator". Every year I want to check the Christmas opening times of my local large store and every year I use the so called Sainsbury store locator to find it. Only I never can, because it doesn't turn up if I enter my post code and because they don't use fuzzy matching, unless you enter that period after the "St" of "St. Albans", which is the nearest town, you can whistle for one of their flagship stores. I have complained about this for years, but nothing happens and now I get messages that they are receiving a large number of emails so tough luck on getting a response. No wonder they have slipped down the rankings. No-one can find their stores. Do you remember the debacle of their Nectar loyalty card registration? You still can't register your card on-line, but they do provide a telephone number.

I decided to sign up for the new eVat service. They wanted five pieces of information from me, one of which was my exact original VAT registration date. Now I vaguely remember that it must have been sometime in the last quarter of 1989 when I set up my business, but the exact date escapes me. Tough luck, as all five pieces of information have to be correct and their help desk is closed at weekends. I also need separate PINs to change my VAT registration details and to submit my return. Do I see an auditor's hand in preventing me from registering for this service?

Compare all of the above woes with a mail order firm in the USA. I placed my order over the web, got immediate confirmation that it was an in-stock item, an immediate email that my order had been taken, a next day confirmation that it had left the warehouse, a tracking number in case I wanted to know where in the world it was and the item arrived three days later. So it is possible to get it right. I suspect you have a few stories on these issues. Drop me a line and air your

grievances, or plaudits, in our letters column. No-one has written for ages and I'm feeling a bit lonely. Perhaps that is why I am feeling particularly grumpy, although in truth it is the content of the next paragraph that has brought on my mood.

Now for some good news and some very bad news. Jeremy Jaynes a US spammer has just been sentenced to nine years in jail for his activities. Jaynes was ranked as the eighth most prolific spammer in the US, sending out some 100,000 messages each month. What amazed me was that he has reportedly made £13 million from saps who responded to his various offerings. The very, very bad news? Marta Andreason, the brave EU whistle blower, was finally dismissed by the outgoing Commission after being suspended for over two years. They didn't have the guts to do it while they were still in their jobs, but waited until the last possible minute to avoid any further mud being thrown at them for a disgraceful dereliction of duty at a time when the European Court of Auditors reports that it cannot give assurance over the spending of 93% of the EU's £70 billion budget. So much for corporate governance and the (un)ethical behaviour of our unelected appointees. It makes me really angry that these people are appointed by governments who do not meet even their own economic rules for continuing membership of the euro. A depressing conclusion to the year.

On to more positive things, the content of this issue. Celeste Rush concludes her paper on computer forensics, while Bob Ashton our correspondent from the antipodes updates us on business continuity planning in Australia. Mark Smith has negotiated some excellent member only benefits and Greg Krehel provides some useful advice on identifying those really important things to prove your case.

The festive season is now upon us and I send you the compliments of the season and a productive new year.