

Help the Technician



If you've ever walked into a computer repair store, you've probably seen this exchange: Customer sets computer on desk. Customer waits for technician to end three harried, simultaneous phone calls. Technician finally stops running long enough to listen to customer. Customer says, "My computer is broken." Technician asks for some—any—details. Customer can't provide any. Technician sighs heavily and says repairs will take at least a week. Customer balks and ponders whether to try another shop. In the meantime, harried technician answers seven more phone calls and a dozen e-mail messages. By the time the customer makes up his mind, repairs will now take two weeks.

Most computer repair shops are extremely busy. Despite what you might think from the repair prices, most computer repair shops don't make a lot of profit from working with individual users. Instead, they spend the majority of their time working with businesses and network customers, leaving little time for them to test every possible problem for your computer.

However, you can help the repair technician help you—and probably cut down significantly on the amount of time a repair will require—by following these two tips.

Keep track of error messages and warning signs. Write down any specific error messages you see. These messages probably won't mean much to you, but they will give the technician important clues. If the computer made any strange noises or exhibited any strange behavior before crashing, make note of them, too.

Walk through the final minutes. No matter how painful it is, you'll need to relive the final few moments before your system crash. Remember the last thing you were doing. That helps point them in the right direction. Make sure you tell the technician exactly what programs were running and what you were doing with the computer just before the crash.

Don't be surprised if the technician recommends completely replacing any worn out or malfunctioning parts inside your computer rather than suggesting fixing the parts. Parts repair isn't done much; it's just not worth it. It's a complex device, and it's expensive to service. In addition, you'll be saving money with new parts in 99% of repair cases.

If Windows is creating the problems, don't be surprised if he recommends erasing everything on the computer hard drive and starting over. A good computer repair shop will be sensitive of your data and do everything possible to back you up first and save what they can. If only one specific program is causing problems, they need to know that as well and they may try to fix it. But spending too long trying to repair is not economical when a complete reformat may save time.