## Consumer Electronics Service In The 21st Century

### "Let's Get Really Small!"

by C.J. Huss

**Chapter Eight**

**Preface: What, us worry?**

Ahh, the Y2K crisis. You remember that, right? Back in 1999, there was a humongous deal of concern that a failure to properly recognize the turn of the century date by worldwide computer systems would lead to sporadic service outages or possibly even a massive collapse of modern society itself.

The problem, in a nutshell, was poor software engineering. However, since in actuality the rollover from '99 to '00 caused pretty much a boatload of nothing to occur, said bad engineering turned out to be of little consequence in this particular, and the world successfully dodged a cyber-bullet and went on about its ways.

Meanwhile, another technological debacle was occurring, and has in fact been occurring in increasing frequency for the last twenty or more years. The difference is that no one was paying any attention to it, and furthermore almost no one is attending to it right now.

The bad news is that it's too late to do anything about it. The good news is...the Y2K thing never happened. So maybe we're even.

**In the beginning... no, wait, we already did that. This is the late middle or thereabouts.**

Have you noticed how inexpensive a lot of modern electronic products have become? Desire to purchase VCRs is essentially gone from the marketplace, and manufacturing production followed suit. But if you still cared to use one of these machines, up until a few years ago you could buy one with a DVD player bundled in for about as much as a week's groceries for a small family. This for a device that once cost between $500 to $1000 or more.

DVD players have followed the same roller-coaster-drop in cost, and did so in only about 8 or 9 years, as opposed to over 20 for VCRs. Computers-- still far and away the most complex piece of electronics commonly sold to the average consumer-- can be purchased for as little as $300, and even state-of-the-art consumer PC's are not a lot more than that. Twenty-five years ago, you could pay $1500 *just for a hard drive*, and a measly 60-to-100 megabyte drive at that. Nowadays, most people's choice in a computer is simply their smart-phone. Examples in other product categories are rife.

So, what's the big old deal alluded to previously? In what microeconomic way is the world ending, and why should you care?

Because the era of repairing electronic devices that have broken down or worn out is ending, and it's ending soon. Odds are you've already had some personal experience with this phenomena. Perhaps you brought your 25-year old VCR into a service shop a while back-- you know, the one that weighs 15 pounds and by virtue of said hefty construction suggests that it would be near-on criminal to just chuck it into recycling?

Sorry, but with rarest exception there it will likely go. Even assuming you can get parts to repair it, would any rational person spend hundreds to repair a machine when DVRs are part of many cable or satellite boxes and are readily available? Or when many people simply stream or download a TV show or movie whenever they feel like watching it?

Didn't think so. And let's say you aren't "rational", but caught up in the iron grip of sentimentality or just plain darn techno-stubbornness. You make it known that you are willing to pay more than the product is theoretically worth, and fix it come what may, and you go looking for a service shop to take on the quest.

You can't find any. If by some miracle you do find one, the grizzled, bent-over service tech therein will stare at you balefully (unless he's properly caffeinated) and refuse to even check your darling into the shop. You get upset. You beg and plead, it does no good. You offer some choice thoughts, either silently or aloud, and then head for the door. *"Sorry, Mister,"* the tech calls from behind you. *"I am, really."*

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OK, the essay portion of the test is over. Now for the multiple choice part. Be aware that every question is a trick question and that there are no correct answers among the possibilities offered:

**Multiple choice department:**

1. *Service people are all anti-social geeks who prefer the company of machines to people.*

A. All I can see is it raining on me / And my plastic fantastic lover.
B. If you had to repair machines for a living, you'd be anti-social too.
C. Brain-damage is as brain-damage does.

2. *What do you mean, they don't make parts any more? It's only 50 years old!!*

A. Dude, chill! That thing's older than I am.
B. Well, we can try to scavenge parts for it from other similar models and do a restoration. Are you willing to invest six or seven hundred dollars at minimum for our time to do that? No? Nothing over $100.00? OK, I see.
C. Only?

3. *What do you mean, they don't make parts any more? It's only 5 years old!!*

A. Dude, chill! The new model's got more features and it's half the price.
B. The company got bought out and the new owners don't make any parts for anything, ever. They are totally part-challenged.
C. Only?

4. *You guys have a bad attitude.*

A. It was worse. It's gotten better lately. The drugs help a lot, and the counseling.
B. Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.
C. We don't want to, but if you had to do service work for a manufacturer who treats everything defective or wonky or badly designed that makes it out of their door as something that is now your problem, you'd need therapy too.

5. *Is this a 20-questions thing?*

A. No, just five. It's almost all over now, so just go with the flow.
B. It's really all about having a sense of humor. You really, really need one to repair anything these days.
C. You can go back and answer the questions three more times, but there's no extra credit if you do, sorry. We do admire your dedication.

OK, folks-- humor break's over, so back on your heads.

~sigh~ Oh, well...next issue, I'll get into exactly, and truthfully, what electronic service (and sales) personnel have to deal with in the here and now. But first and foremost, it is essential to realize that, on average, modern electronic products do far more for far less money than ever before in history. This is generally a wonderful thing, but it can also lead to certain largely intractable problems, which are worth going over in some additional detail.

Until then, if what you've got now is working well, and has made it to a ripe old age, thank the engineers who designed it and the people who built it– or built the machines that built it, or– supplied the raw materials that were used to...OK, you get the idea.

Take care, and happy tunes! (Or flicks, or TV, or... whatever amazing tech float-eth thy boat!)  - CJ

## Scenes from the November Pennsylvania Music Expo