

Top 5ive Products You Should Never Repair

By Stacey L. Bradford
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IT'S A CONSUMER'S NIGHTMARE: Your pricey gadget breaks down just when the warranty expires. Then you're left with a conundrum. Do you shell out big bucks for a repair? Or trash the thing and buy new?

One way to postpone the issue is to buy an extended warranty. But more often than not, those are a waste of money, too. (Click [here](#)¹ to determine whether an extended warranty is worth the added cost.)

From computers to iPods, here's some advice on how to handle the inevitable breakdowns:

1. Desktop and Laptop Computers

Repair: \$250 (1)
Replace: \$499 (2)

Tired of your computer crashing on you? Before you hire the Geek Squad to tinker with it, consider this: According to a 2004 Consumer Reports survey of 2,300 readers, 31% of desktop computers weren't fixed properly the first time or didn't work well afterward.

Still, knowing whether to junk it or not is often a judgment call. Here are some general guidelines: If the computer is more than five years old, or runs on an operating system that's older than Windows XP or Mac OS X v10.0, buy a new one, says Dean Gallea, program leader for computer testing at Consumer Reports. If it's between two and five years old, consider a cheap upgrade. If it's slow, for example, try adding memory for \$50 to \$100. If you've run out of hard-drive space for your digital photos and MP3 files, buy an external drive for \$50 to \$100. But if that desktop keeps crashing and you have to shell out \$250 for a "diagnostic" session, then you're probably better off buying something new.

"You can get a new budget-level desktop for \$300 that will probably be much more powerful than the thing that you're scratching your head over," says Gallea.

Of course, ditching your old computer is a lot trickier than just throwing it out on the curb. Click [here](#)² for advice on how to dispose of it without risking identity theft.

2. Digital Cameras

Repair \$180 (3)
Replace: \$200 (4)

Digital cameras tend to be fairly reliable. But when they do break down, you'll end up spending an average of \$180 to fix it, according to Consumer Reports. That's pretty steep considering a new Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W80 point and shoot with seven megapixels runs just over \$200. And even if you are inclined to spend the money to repair it, you'll still have to deal with the hassle factor. Most digital cameras are repaired off-site, meaning you'll have to mail it to some remote location and wait at least a couple of weeks for its return.

Chances are you'll be quite pleased with the new digital cameras on the market. The resolution and color just keeps getting better. Battery life is also longer and you won't need a magnifying glass to see the LCD screen. There are even some cameras that shoot 3D pictures and others that allow you to edit video clips in-camera.

3. MP3 Players

Repair: \$99 (5)
Replace: \$149 (6)

If your MP3 player costs under \$200 don't even think about repairing it, says Tom Merritt, editor of CNET. If you drop your iPod Nano, which retails for \$149, Apple will charge you a flat repair fee of \$99 to fix it. Better to invest some money in protective gear, including a silicone case for \$25, that will absorb some of the fall should it slip through your fingers.

iPods and other MP3 players that retail for more than \$400 you may want to fix. But before you send that iPod back to Apple, Merritt suggests looking online to see if anyone else had the same problem and how he or she resolved it. If your iPod, for example, spontaneously turns on in the middle of the night — yes, it happens — you can fix it by resetting or reformatting the player. For more on iPods, read our story "10 Things Your iPod Won't Tell You³."

4. Microwave Ovens

Repair: \$120 (7)

Replace: \$70 (8)

Has your microwave seen better days? "There is almost no situation when you should repair it," says Chris Hall, president of Repairclinic.com, a website that sells replacement parts for appliances. Average repairs run about \$120. And whatever you do, don't try to cut costs by fixing it yourself. Microwave ovens have a very high voltage component that can stay charged even when the appliance is unplugged, warns Hall. If you accidentally touch it you'll get a severe shock. Heart patients or those with a pace maker could even risk death, he says.

The only parts Hall recommends replacing are the plastic door latch and the glass dish. Spot any other problems, including a faulty touch pad, and that microwave should get tossed.

5. Cellphones

Repair: Irrelevant (9)

Replace: Free (10)

Cellphones take quite a beating, so it isn't surprising that they break often. Whether they can be fixed or not isn't the point. The wireless carriers make it so attractive to trade in an older phone that it doesn't make sense to even consider the hassle of a repair. T-Mobile, for example, offers customers a new phone every 11 months as long as they hold a one-year contract. Verizon will replace a phone every two years with a new two-year contract.

If your phone dies after your warranty has expired but before you're entitled to a new handset, check back to see if you paid for your phone by credit card. American Express Cards, Visa Signature, MasterCard Gold, Platinum and World cards all extend your warranty by one more year. Don't have one of these credit cards? Verizon offers an early upgrade program that lets consumers with service plans of \$49.99 or more that lets consumers receive promotional pricing on all new phones, although a fee may apply.

Even if you want, say, a MOTORAZR2 V9m, which retails for \$350, the wireless carriers will subsidize it with a \$100 online discount so that it doesn't set you back nearly as much as it could. Indeed, the average cellphone is subsidized by as much as \$100, says Neil Strother, research director for mobile devices for NPD Group, a Port Washington, N.Y.-based market research company. "The phones are a loss leader for the carriers," he says. "The contracts are worth much more to them."

The good news is that if the phone is old enough to be off warranty you'll get a lot of new features when you upgrade, says CNET's Merritt. LG's Chocolate phone, which came out last year, for example, can play MP3 files and retails for just \$130.

Sources:

1. Flat fee to figure out what's wrong with your computer from Geek Squad, a repair service for personal computers.
2. Starting cost for a Dell Inspiron 1501 laptop; source Dell.
3. Average repair cost according to Consumer Reports.
4. Cost for a Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W80 digital camera; source Best Buy.
5. Flat repair fee from Apple Computer.
6. Cost for a new iPod Nano.
7. Average repair cost according to Repairclinic.com.
8. Cost for a new Kenmore microwave; source Sears.

9. Wireless carriers prefer to give customers a new phone.
10. Free Samsung u340 VGA camera phone with a new two year contract from Verizon.

This article was updated on Oct. 10, 2007 to reflect Verizon's latest service offerings and clarify the terms of those offers.

Links in this article:

¹<http://www.smartmoney.com/consumer/index.cfm?story=20050707>

²<http://www.smartmoney.com/dealoftheday/index.cfm?story=20060724>

³<http://www.smartmoney.com/10things/index.cfm?story=june2006>

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