

My Best Buy Sales Experience

I needed a new laptop last month and I went into Best Buy to buy a 17" Samsung Series 3 I had seen on their web site. It had everything I was looking for, and amazingly enough, Best Buy had the lowest price I could find anywhere, online included. So I get there, and after browsing the laptop section for a while I can't find it. Great, I think to myself, even though I just checked stock on their website 15 minutes ago it must not be accurate and they are sold out. So I locate one of the employees and ask him what's up, (here is where the story starts to get weird). I give him the model number I wrote down before leaving home and ask him if they have any of the Samsung Series 3 laptops. It turns out that they do, in fact they have a whole bunch of them he says. Great, I think to myself, and asked him if he could show me where they are, since I must have missed them somehow. He points to a spot on a skid on top of a shelf some 8 feet or so in the air, and I verified on the box that it is the item I am looking for.

He then tells me he would be happy to sell me one of them, they just didn't have any of them on display. No problem, I thought to myself, I will just get him to get one down for me using the conveniently placed ladder nearby so I can take a look at it. Nope. He said he couldn't do that; neither could he let me get one down and open it myself. I ask why and he says they can't sell it as new if I open it. I said I know, but if for some reason I don't buy it--which I am planning to do--then they will now have a display model. He again apologized but stated that he didn't understand why this was a problem that I couldn't physically lay my hands on the laptop before I bought it. He said he has a picture here of the item on his POS display I can look at as well as he can pull up the specs on the website for me, what more could I want to know?

Well, for starters, what does the keyboard feel like? Was it squishy or does it have positive tactile feedback (aka old IBM) when typing? What is the viewing angle like on the LCD panel, which is important if you are trying to show someone standing beside you something? Which type of touch pad does it have, the modern near ubiquitous kind or the old school fragile pointing stick? Does it have a lot of crapware pre-loaded on it, so much that will take me many hours to remove? What are the WEI scores? The graphics and the CPU portion are of particular interest to me. Not only do none of my arguments above sway him, he still can't even comprehend that I in fact have any legitimate concerns.

Needless to say I didn't buy the Samsung Series 3 laptop I wanted that day. Now I accept that all of you reading this out there who buy a laptop mail order don't get to know the answers to many of those questions posed above, either, but isn't that one of the main reasons to buy something retail? You get to kick the tires and test drive the product before you buy it. So this time, even though Best Buy had the product that I wanted to buy in stock in their store, and had the best price on it I could find anywhere, they still lost the sale because they didn't have one on display I could mess around with before I bought it. Barney Fife would be proud.

Now I am not going to sit here and say like some others do that I want to see Best Buy fail and go out of business for their many mistakes. They are one of the last places near where I live that I can get into my car and go to when I need a piece of hardware right away like a Hard Drive for a client that can't or won't wait for it to be shipped. My main local independent computer parts store (Hi Gary) is closed Saturday and Sunday, and if Best Buy closes as well that means I am left scavenging my own personal PCs for parts on weekends! Which is never fun, trust me. Then there are times like this one where I wanted to test a product before I buy and I don't want to see that go away.

Best Buy is really not in a position to let too many customers with an envelope full of cash walk out the door. Not unless they want their doors to close for good. In this case Best Buy was its own worst enemy. If they do go out of business--and again I hope they don't--I think they will have to consider blaming themselves and their sometimes ridiculous business practices, instead of the nearly insurmountably-changing buying habits of the modern American consumer spiel that I read from them in the media all the time.

If this was Hollywood my story would end there, but it isn't and it didn't. You see, I still didn't have a laptop which I badly needed, and after six months of squirreling away every penny of mad money I could get my hands on I was more than ready to buy right damn now. So I restarted my laptop search and when I decided on laptop choice number two, an 17" HP Pavilion G7, it turns out Best Buy had it as well, and it was once again cheaper than anything else comparable I found--even on NewEgg. So, with much reluctance I swallowed the bad taste I had in my mouth from my earlier Best Buy experience (which I was considering

combating with a extra high blood pressure pill before I left) and went back to the same store, hoping against hope this time the results would be different.

They were, well sort of anyway. They had the 17" HP Pavilion G7 laptop at Best Buy, it was in stock, and they had a display model that I could mess around with, which I did and found it satisfactory so I decided to buy one. Where things once again got ugly was when I tried to checkout. I ended up spending a full ten minutes (I am not exaggerating here) refusing extended warranties, accidental damage plans, Best Buy credit offers, etc. I have worked in the past at an office supply store selling PCs, among other things, and I understand the underlying plus-selling financial reasons why those behaviors exist. But, when it becomes obvious that the person listening is not responsive to your pitch, if you are smart you soon stop the "hard sell" routine, which at this point is only likely to damage the store, customer relationship and even potentially leave the employee with egg on his face (Think Runaway Bride for my female readers) as the customer drops their product and sprints for the nearest exit,. and let them finish checking out.

Ah, well I guess I should just consider this latest Best Buy fiasco to be job security. After all, if I look closely there is probably enough material there for a whole other future Best Buy rant. Too bad Circuit City, CompUSA, and Computer City are all out of business here, or I could threaten Best Buy with doing my weekend shopping somewhere else.

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