

## The Sunday Times - Doors

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### Send for Super Computer Repairman

Who can we turn to when our gadgets play up? The local techie wizard, of course. His is a fast-expanding profession, and, for Angus McGill, he's almost part of the family. Computers are clever, of course — speak as you find — but have you noticed how the smallest thing puts them out? If you don't plug them in, they sit there like a pudding, and if you don't switch them on, well, forget it. They won't do a hand's turn. Touchy, hairsplitting, maddening sticklers for the rule book, computers can drive the mildest man to dreadful bouts of techno rage. But hold steady. Do not hit your computer. Ring your computer guru.

Computer gurus belong to what is surely the world's youngest profession, and they serve a huge marketplace. More than half the households in the UK have computers now, and many have two or three. A house being done up for sale on television recently had five in a row in the living room. Not surprisingly, the owners were finding it hard to sell.

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So, more than 12m computers in domestic use, all of them, at some stage, going wrong; millions of despairing families in immediate need of a helping hand. What a golden time for bright young computer technicians, with these millions dying to meet them — and such a welcome when they turn up: cups of coffee, biscuits ... Which ambitious mother would not be proud of her son, the computer guru? There are plenty around. I have been talking to three lately, and there are umpteen in Yellow Pages. Look under Computer Maintenance. One ad takes up almost a whole page, announcing branches in Mayfair, the City and Docklands. Others manage with a single line — Beetee Computers, Computer Trouble, Computer Crash Centre ... One, with excellent timing, slipped his card under the windscreen wiper of my parked car a few days ago. It read: "PC Problems? We will help you." It so happened that I did have a PC problem. I usually do.

This time, my computer had fallen out with my digital camera. Possibly, it was the camera's fault — it can be touchy, too — but it was full of snaps taken at the weekend, and nothing would persuade it to transfer the pictures to the screen. So I rang the number on the card and, that afternoon, Tom Breza, 29, smart, brisk and smiling, was ringing my door bell. Four minutes later, the screen was filled with pictures of my friend Peter Conradi and his border collies, and computer and camera were again on the friendliest of terms.

Breza is Polish and, he explained, has been into computers from the age of six. He started work with a computer firm in his home town, Leobork, and at 22 he came to England and got a job as a technician in a London computer shop. This was not a success. "I was upset how they run the business, how they treat people", he said. "Always they were shouting. Never they ring people back. I was not happy. So I open my own company and do things my own way."

That was six years ago, and his own way has worked pretty well. "The company at first started very slow," he said. "I had just £200 in my pocket and very little English, and when I had no money, I did not eat." But each customer led to others, and his energy and ambition knew no bounds. He took on an assistant, then another and another, and he now has an office in Hans Crescent, in swanky Knightsbridge, and employs 11 people — four technicians, the rest office staff and people finding him work. If you park a car in central London, you, too, will probably have found his card under your windscreen wiper.

The mobile phone in his jacket pocket rang continually: Scott Joplin for incoming calls, a plain peep-peep for voice messages. He politely checked the mobile with a quick glance each time, then continued without a pause. He works hard, he said, sometimes very long hours, tries to keep down the costs and the prices, charges £30 an hour, with no call-out fee, and goes everywhere by bus or Tube, as does everyone else in the company. There is so much work out there, he will soon need another technician. "By 2010, I want to be the biggest UK company in this market," he said. Didi didi-di-di, went the phone in his pocket.

## **Guru Tom's three most frequent call-out problems**

**1 VIRUSES** It's a shame people don't learn to protect themselves, because viruses are a nightmare. We clean their computer, but in five minutes it could be infected again, because 70% of people don't protect their machine. They haven't a clue how to. The other 30% are basically afraid to try. They think the computer is a toy — but it's an advanced tool, more advanced than a car. You can cause as much harm to your own life using a PC as driving a car slightly drunk, if you go to the wrong site. Every so often, people are sent a warning about a virus, but it's usually a hoax. I tell my customers not to do anything. Give me a call and I'll pop over.

**2 INSTALLATION** We are asked to configure a computer for broadband, but that's just the beginning of somebody's troubles, because on broadband, they are always connected to the net, so become easier for hackers to target. Hackers try to create zombie machines to use in attacks on big servers, such as Microsoft's or Yahoo!'s. Unless your broadband is configured properly, your computer, with thousands of others, could be used to generate enough traffic to knock down a powerful £2m server — and your machine will be caught in the crossfire. It is serious. If you are hit by a small stone, it won't kill you, but a truckful of stones hitting you will definitely kill you.

**3 SOFTWARE** People want us to teach them how to get the best out of their software. In their sixties, they often receive a computer as a gift from their children, so they want someone who won't use jargon to spend time telling them where to start, what keys to press, what the internet is for. Other people can feel stupid asking obvious questions, so we advise them to buy a good book such as the Complete Idiot's Guide to Windows, or to the internet, or to networking your home. These answer questions that people are reluctant to ask. You mustn't be afraid to experiment — you won't be able to destroy a machine. We can quickly put it right.

## **Emergency clicks**

[www.pcservice-net.co.uk](http://www.pcservice-net.co.uk)

Tom Breza