

BLEEDING EDGE CHARLES WRIGHT

What a woman really wants

One woman's battle to make her computer and scanner compatible has revealed much more.

LIKE many males, Bleeding Edge has devoted a good deal of time to discovering what women want. Specifically, we'd like to know what they want in their dealings with computers.

We think we had a small epiphany just the other day when a woman research fellow at Monash University sought our advice on the matter on the hardware package she had bought from a Melbourne retailer on January 20 this year.

She had paid an Essendon dealer \$4280 for a HP Compaq Evo D330 computer with a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 CPU and 256MB of RAM, HP ScanJet 3970 flat-bed scanner, HP LaserJet 1300 mono laser printer, and HP LCD screen. One of the things she wanted was the security that everything would be compatible.

It was a reasonable expectation. HP computers ought to know what HP printers and scanners want, and vice versa; but sadly, it didn't turn out to be so. The other thing she wanted — which is why she had been prepared to pay all that money to Hewlett-Packard — was the support of a well-known company in tending to problems without delay. Women don't want to mess with computers, they want them to work, as expected, and if they don't work, they want someone else to fix them, ASAP.

She was disappointed there too. As she pointed out to the folks at Hewlett-Packard in her first letter to them in February: "As soon as I switched the computer on, I received a

**I need help with my computer.
Can I get it in pink?**



ILLUSTRATION: LUISA LA ROCCA

whiplash and bilateral tenosynovitis." Not what women want at all.

The scanner software was installed and reinstalled several times, but a program called HP Director kept insisting "A Runtime Error has occurred. Do you wish to Debug? Line: 125 Error: Library not registered." When she clicked "No," she got a new error message: "Line 81 Library not registered."

HP performed diagnostic tests that indicated nothing was wrong with the computer. The only change in her situation was that she got a new error message,

immediately fell out with the PC.

Eventually, at nine one morning, a nice man came around from HP. He tried until 7pm to fix the problem. Nothing worked.

It was June when it dawned on Hewlett-Packard that something was wrong with their scanner software. Even without the scanner being connected, the PC threw up a blue screen and went off to sulk.

The woman informed HP that they were responsible for the mess and for wasting large amounts of her time. She wasn't impressed when they told her, "We've never encountered

scanner software suggested that there was a possibility that it might not work with any other scanner. We didn't want to face the consequences of recommending a replacement that didn't solve the problem. Women don't want that.

When we suggested that she might take the refund and buy something else, we learnt something else about what women want from PCs. They want them to look nice. "I must have a slimline computer or at least one where the screen can sit on top of the computer because I have limited space," she explained. "And I need a printer and scanner too — preferably all greyish (not beige) for aesthetic reasons."

That presented us with a new issue. We have remarked on the aesthetics of equipment — most Apple Macs, for instance, or the Lian-Li PC case — but we generally recommend something on the basis of performance and value. Also, we prefer not to have a PC on the desk, which is another area where we, being typically male, differ from the average female.

Frankly, we are at a bit of a loss here. We would welcome some suggestions about slimline cases and aesthetics to save our skin.

That leaves us with the other thing that women want: access to someone who can install everything and provide immediate support when something goes wrong.

One of the consequences of computers having become such commodities is that profits are too slim to allow even the big manufacturers such as Hewlett-Packard to provide that level of hand-holding.

It's far better, in our opinion, to save money by buying a high-quality clone — possibly using the specifications we provide each quarter — and spend the savings on a reliable tech support person. You can ask knowledgeable friends to recommend someone.

She was disappointed there too. As she pointed out to the folks at Hewlett-Packard in her first letter to them in February: "As soon as I switched the computer on, I received a Serious Error message and ever since have been plagued by crashes, error and debug messages, including a Serious Error message while typing to you."

She had lost days at a time "touring (HP tech support installations in) India by telephone, carting my new HP back and forth to the supplier for reinstallation, repeatedly re-setting my desktop, folders, macros, checking all operations, backing up and, in the process, achieving nothing other than dissatisfaction and extreme aggravation of my

indicated nothing was wrong with the computer. The only change in her situation was that she got a new error message, something to do with IRQs, which she dubbed "the Iraq messages".

HP, which by this stage seemed — not surprisingly — desperate to get off the hook with this customer who was determined that her computer and scanner would collaborate, offered her a complete refund or replacement. She didn't want a refund, so they told her they would pay for a second PC and sent her off to a Lonsdale Street retailer where she picked up a slightly upgraded model of her computer. It had double the RAM and a DVD combo drive. HP also shipped her a new scanner. It too,

responsible for the mess and for wasting large amounts of her time. She wasn't impressed when they told her, "We've never encountered this before."

HP did, however, meet its responsibilities by offering her a full refund on both items. She decided to keep the PC and buy a new scanner. That was where Bleeding Edge came into the picture. She wanted to know what we would recommend as a replacement for the HP ScanJet.

Knowing women want straight answers, we told her she should sell the PC. In our view, Hewlett-Packard might have been correct in declaring there was nothing wrong with it, but the fact that it had failed to work with the HP

tech support person. You can ask knowledgeable friends to recommend someone.

Less fiercely independent females could consider a possible alternative: find a male who knows what he's doing around computers and swap his advice for the occasional home-cooked meal. That's what men want.

Charles Wright appears regularly in Tuesday's Next section. He can be contacted at cw@bleedingedge.com.au You can follow this column online at bleedingedge.com.au