



On the Support Desk

I have been 'messing about with' computers since the late 1970s. In those days, I was working for a music store, and in my efforts to develop ways to improve our business, I investigated the possibility of using a computer to help us. As it turned out, such an idea was premature - computers at that time were far too large, complex, and expensive, and they did not suit our requirements. But away from the business, just for my own education and interest, I read a great deal about them, and even paid for a 'time share' system that I accessed from a terminal on my desk via an ancient telephone modem.

As a result of those early studies, I now have a pretty good knowledge of computer systems, and - of course - whenever anybody in my family has a problem with their own computer, I'm the one they call. It's always fun to get these calls. I like puzzles, and it's definitely a puzzle sometimes, trying to diagnose a problem on a computer on the other side of the world, when the person giving you the information doesn't well understand the system they are using. Sometimes the problem turns out to be simple - "Umm is it plugged in?" - and sometimes it's a major problem that I can't solve.

Professional help desk workers can sometimes be under immense pressure to come up with solutions quickly, and frequently under abusive behaviour from hostile customers. But nobody yells at me during these episodes of course, so the only pressure involved is my own desire to fix the problem with a minimum of expense and trouble.

The other day though, one of these calls turned out to have quite a unique twist. My mother had called me, needing advice on some particular detail of something she was trying to do with her computer. It's still a bit astonishing to me to think that my mother - who is actually a great-grandmother - uses a computer every day. I'm sure that she herself is sometimes a bit amazed to find herself in this situation; she could never have foreseen that she would one day sit down at a keyboard and monitor, and send out emails!

We were actually having our conversation through the computer itself, using an internet telephone system. Part way along during our call, the telephone software showed a signal that my daughter Himi was online, and we 'invited' her to join the call, making it a three-way conversation - myself in Tokyo, my mother in Vancouver, and my daughter in a city near her grandmother.

What happened next was hilarious for me to listen to. Himi was knitting something for her son Alex and had run into a problem, so she - of course - asked grandma for advice. And now grandma had to do the same thing I usually do - listen to a description of a problem, from a person who doesn't understand well some of the terminology used, and then try to explain what to do. I think the particular problem involved how to make sleeves join the body, or something like that ... I'm sure you can understand the difficulty involved in trying to explain in words how to manage such a complex knitting situation.

It took a while, but Himi did seem to come to understand what to do. They did make an arrangement though, that she should take her knitting with her next time she was visiting her grandma, to have it inspected and discussed.

So now I'm wondering ... is this perhaps a good business opportunity for my mother? Maybe she needs a web page - with a button that people can click ... "Problems with your knitting? Just click here for advice! (Reasonable rates ...)"

Go mom, go!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>