

A cell phone may just be the right gift

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Techwit

Looking for the right holiday gift for an enemy? Give him a cell phone. Or, should I say, sell phone. Because that's all the cell phone companies do is sell them. After all, there's no point in supporting them given that they have the life expectancy of an adolescent attention span. Do I sound bitter? Follow me into cell phone support hell, if you dare.



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It all started when I bought one of those nifty doodle cell phones that can do everything. I set it on my kitchen counter one day and watched it make me a sandwich. But it wouldn't do the only thing I really wanted it to do - I couldn't get it to use my own music for my ring tones.

I emailed the manufacturer and the cell phone company for help. Everyone sent me polite form letters thanking me for buying their product before telling me that what I wanted to do was impossible. So I called them and logged hours of listening to "on hold" music. (Idea: How about some choice here? How about a recording that says "You'll probably be on hold for a few days, so please select the music you would like to listen to. Press 1 for country western, 2 gangsta rap...")

Finally I talked to a human (Remember humans? They're like cell phones except occasionally they work.) I tried not to sound desperate as I explained my need to use my own music for my ring tones. There was a long pause so I finally asked him what he was doing. He told me he was searching Google! I assured him I could do that without his help. He thought I was trying to end the conversation and started to hang up - politely of course. Wait! I pleaded. How about my question?! He admitted that he didn't have an answer. And how could he? One honest support person told me he's responsible for supporting 300 cell phones that come with no help from the manufacturer and which are on the verge of becoming obsolete just because they exist. Besides, he assured me, what I was trying to do was, well, impossible.

So I went to the only place left to me: the land of propeller heads and social misfits. I joined a bunch of cell phone email lists and online support groups to figure out how my cell phone worked. I began emailing people with strange screen names like "Snake Eyes" and "Phony Baloney." I begged for step-by-step instructions in English, and what I got was a series of questions in technospeak, like "Did you try rebooting your framus while holding down the 3, 4 and 7 keys? Make sure you don't hold down the 6 key or something might explode."

I finally prevailed. Three days, hours of on-hold music and tons of cryptic email messages later, I was listening to my own music when my cell phone rang. I sent all of my newfound propeller head friends the magic steps. They embraced me as one of them. Then I told my cell phone company I had done the impossible. I thought they'd offer me a trophy, or maybe a job. Instead they thanked me for buying their product and informed me that it had been discontinued.

Trending this week:

What an interesting approach to business. Manufacturers make the stuff, cell phone companies sell the stuff, and customers support it. But look at the upside. It's how humans remain vital in a digitally overdone world full of rampaging obsolescence. As long as we are expected to fix our own stuff, we will never be obsolete. So this holiday season get someone a cell phone and make him feel wanted. Our machines need us more than ever.

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