

Business

Support Techs Are User-Friendly

By DREW DIXON

Press Journal Staff Writer

They make house calls but instead of diagnosing human ills, these experts want to check out the aches and pains of your personal computer.

"Tech support" is one of the hottest phrases surrounding the computer industry and it's fast becoming a necessity to survive for businesses that deal in computer hardware and software.

"We're getting frustrated customers coming in here," said Claus Schwanitz, owner of Advanced Computer Technology, 100 S. U.S. 1 in Vero Beach. "They're using tech support very heavily. No one likes to read menus (on computers) anymore.

"They're always calling and that's the easiest way," he said. "We don't mind."

Schwanitz doesn't mind because tech support is a standard service he offers to every customer who buys a computer from his store. Not only do they offer maintenance service, but set-up service as well.

A tech-support representative actually goes into the customer's home and installs the system.

"We first talk to them to find out what system fits them best," Schwanitz said of new customers. "Then we deliver the system, hook them up and show them how everything works. We try to be complete."

Bob Callino, owner of Computer Consulting & Services in Vero Beach, agreed tech support is "part of our value."

"We'll support stuff we don't even sell. That's part of our business. The service end has become real important."

The boom in computers in recent years, coupled with a flourishing Internet, is spawning newer, yet older customers who've never used a computer before.

"In the last couple of years, we've seen a lot of first-time computer buyers who are retirees," Schwanitz said. "A lot of their children and grandchildren have computers and they want to be connected to that."

Those are the customers who



Press Journal staff photo by Drew Dixon

Ted Carlson (left) gets help on his home computer system from Juergen Schwanitz, a technician who provides "tech support" for Advanced Computer Technology of Vero Beach.

frequently have never used a computer before and don't understand the nuances of setting up a new system in their home.

"First, they're afraid," Schwanitz said. "They think 'I'm not knowledgeable enough to keep up with modern technology.'"

But even those who've grown up using computers aren't necessarily computer experts.

"They only know it from the user-interface aspect," Callino said. "They don't know the guts of the machine."

A good example of both these levels is 63-year-old Ted Carlson of Vero Beach. Carlson has been using computers for years in desktop publishing and writing. But when it comes to tinkering with the inner workings of his home computer systems — he has two — he calls Advanced Computer Technology.

"I got sound cards, CD ROMs ... when you start adding things like that, you have to have someone who can set them," Carlson said. "To have them come here is tremendous."

Schwanitz' son, Juergen, is the technician who makes many of the house calls. "We don't look at them as customers, they're more like friends. You have to be involved," he said.

"You can't be a robot," Schwanitz said. "If you're really stiff, they're not going to call you back

for anything. You can have all the (educational) degrees possible, but sometimes it doesn't work."

That philosophy apparently pays off.

"You develop a working relationship and he knows my machines," Carlson said.