

Tech Support is a Teamwork Effort

Radio Guide often features discussions about the role of tech support in our industry. Reading the September column from Jeff Welton of the Nautel customer support team, it seemed uncanny to me how similar the customer calls to Nautel were to those to us here at Telos/Omnia/Axia.

Of course, both Nautel and Telos/Omnia/Axia probably communicate with many of the same people in similar situations: people needing help when the radio stops playing.

UNDERSTANDING THE CALLER

When the tech support phone rings, customer and company begin a dialog. Immediately, our tech support representative tries to figure out if we are talking with an experienced engineer or a non-technical station employee.

We may need to begin the chat by having to interpret what “zorched” means or decipher a scribbled note duct-taped to a problem unit saying, “It’s dead.” For some reason whatever occurred happened when the only witness was some non-technical person charged with setup and teardown.

Once we are speaking the same language, we can go back and try to find out what happened just before the gear died or got “zorched.”

GETTING TO THE PROBLEM

We start with the basics: Have they read the instruction manual?(!) Have they tried to reproduce the problem on the bench? Does it even appear to power up? Are they sure their cables and cords are OK?

What does the front panel indicate? Is there any meter indication? Any smoke? Is anything heard from the output?

Did they open the top and check for any obvious signs, like something burned? Are the power supply rails close to nominal? What about the ancillary equipment and line(s) to which it is connected?

YOUR PART IN TECH SUPPORT

Before you call tech support, it helps to be sure the obvious things are not to blame.

If you know what each control does, with a bit of experience and expertise, you may find the problem to be simple enough (and much more economical) to repair in-house.

While looking for obvious signs of trouble, be sure to record the symptoms. Then, if you determine the problem lies deep within the circuitry or you are puzzled by an unfamiliar symptom, call the tech support line. Factory tech support is there for you *after* you have tried to solve the problem locally. Your preliminary bench work will pay off.

Have the unit’s model and serial number ready along with the information you have gathered. Do not forget to mention any conditions of use that may have contributed to the failure. For example, was it accidentally submerged, left in a hot sun, or did it absorb a cup of coffee or pizza grease?

At that point, we may ask some of what you might consider “elementary” questions in “first grade-level tech talk.” This is partly because, as our industry changes, many customers are not all that experienced in technical matters. Furthermore, while the support person was not there when the failure happened, he may recognize something you might have thought unimportant.

SOLVING PROBLEMS TOGETHER

Depending on the problem (especially intermittents), it may take some time to track down the answer. Be patient. When the tech support person gets to the deeper technical questions, it may take some time to correlate your responses and figure out what is causing the problem.

If there are two similar pieces of equipment available, try swapping them. For telco equipment, try a different, known good line or a different port if a phone line malfunctions.

For POTS lines, connect a butt-set to the line and listen for battery and dialing sounds. For ISDN lines, refer to the error codes that come back.

Have a small battery power amplifier/speaker handy to listen to a line-level output jack. Keep a known good set of headphones and a multimeter nearby. However, without a basic audio generator, multimeter, scope, butt-set or signal tracer, it is futile to try and troubleshoot much of anything. If you do not have time or test equipment, just ask for a return authorization and be done with it.

WHEN THEY SEEM TO TAKE FOREVER


At Telos/Omnia/Axia good tech support can be time consuming. The support engineer may be on a line helping someone else when you call, or answering a complicated e-mail inquiry in detail.

We have a real live person answering the phones during all our business hours, and we check our e-mail 24/7. If you are experiencing a dire emergency, tell that to the receptionist and you will get first priority from the next available engineer. But please do not “cry wolf.”

Be patient in expecting the return call, but be ready for it – keep your call-back number open!

Factory tech support is something we all occasionally need to use. It is a “no charge” resource available to everyone who uses our products. Use that resource wisely.

Ted Alexander, Telos/Omnia/Axia tech support engineer and national voiceover talent, is well experienced as chief engineer for many Cleveland area radio stations. Contact Ted at AMFMTV@aol.com



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