

Ask Jon Eakes

# Do's and Don'ts for Laptop Computer Crashes

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As you may know, my laptop computer has been an integral part of all my Home Improvement TV shows and public appearances and over the years I have gone from computer to computer to profit from the continual improvements. The first live national TV open line show, the House Hot Line Show, circa 1996 had a laptop that barely worked, in fact no manufacturer wanted to be part of the show because they were all afraid it would crash on live national TV. I had an external hard disk hidden under the disk to hold all those graphics that I was grabbing because as I recall the computer itself had a whopping 1Gig hard drive. We couldn't compress the graphics, because it was too slow to decompress jpgs on live TV. From under 100 to over 700 MHz of speed in 5 years and still growing is great improvement, not to mention my 1 gig hard drive that went to 20 gigs and now I can't even count how big it is. But I have lived with crashes as well, although only one on live TV which I managed to cover with a commercial break. We came back and it was still rebooting but I managed to fake it saying it was still computing complicated solar shading. In those days we did go have coffee when we asked the laptops to compute something. After we got started on live TV I found a specialty store that sold nothing but laptops, the first in Montreal, and they keep me up and running in real time and even today. Richard at the Montreal Ultrasoft store wrote out the following tips for dealing with LapTop problems back in the year 2000 and surprisingly it is still good advice.

**Do's and Don'ts of Notebook Computer Breakdowns and Repairs -- by Richard Eckerlin, www.1-800-notebook.com -- Montreal, Quebec, Canada.**

- 1) **DO** call the dealer where you bought your notebook if it breaks down. Your dealer should be your first line of defense and is in a position to at least help you with advice. Often the dealer can tell the difference between a software problem (which is not covered under warranty) versus a true hardware problem (which is covered under warranty).
- 2) **DON'T** pack the unit and just send it back to the manufacturer. There is a procedure required, usually in the form of requesting an RMA # (Return Merchandise Authorization Number) or an SRA Number (Service Return Authorization Number). The manufacturer service center will refuse the notebook computer if the SRA or RMA number is not clearly indicated on the outside of the package.
- 3) **DO** call the FREE 1-800 support number that all manufacturers maintain for troubleshooting. Write down your problem ahead of time in a clear, concise fashion so that it is easier to explain to a trained technician. Have your model number and serial number handy. And plug-in and turn-on your notebook computer beforehand, right in front of you beside the telephone so that if the technician asks you any specific questions, the machine will be ready as well.
- 4) **DON'T** call a dealer where you did not buy the machine and expect free technical support. First of all, it is bad computer etiquette, and secondly it is just bad manners. Many consumers buy their notebooks at large superstores who are in the business of selling notebooks but not supporting notebooks. Then when they notebook breaks down, they turn to specialty or smaller dealers who give good service but are then expected to provide this service for free even to consumers who buy their notebooks elsewhere. This does not make good business sense and consumers should not have unreal expectations. You get what you pay for, and if that smaller dealer charges \$50 more for his product, it is because of this service.
- 5) **DO** sign-on to the manufacturer's Internet Web-Site and go to the Support or Service section. If there are local authorized service centres available, they will be listed in the Service area, and all kinds of technical support, FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions), and advice will be available. Software drivers, installation instructions and Diagnostic tools are the most useful information on these sites. Read all instructions carefully before proceeding.
- 6) **DON'T** start upgrading your Notebook's Operating System, Computer BIOS or any other internal devices for nothing. There is an expression : IF IT IS NOT BROKEN, DON'T FIX IT. If everything is working fine

and is not broken, tinkering where you don't really understand what you are doing will quite often lead to disaster. If an upgrade is required, get hold of a knowledgeable technician, usually from the manufacture toll-free 1-800 support line and see if that technician can walk you through the procedure step-by-setup.7) DO take the notebook to an AUTHORIZED Service Centre if it requires service and under no conditions to anybody else. There are service centres all around, but unless that particular service centre is recommended by the manufacturer as an Authorized Service Centre, any work they perform will not be covered under warranty, may void the existing warranty and you will certainly have to pay for that service. If in doubt, call the manufacturer support line for further advice & always get the proper address & procedure for service.8) DON'T try to fix what is considered a hardware problem yourself. Do not start removing screws and forcing the notebook open under any circumstances. There are warning labels on the machine which state that there are no user serviceable parts inside the notebook. Notebook computers are not desktops and cannot be opened easily. Doing so will certainly void the manufacturer warranty.9) DO keep a log in case the problem involved is considered 'intermittent'. In other words, if the problem does not happen all the time but only under certain circumstances, then write down each incident separately and keep this to show to a trained technician. It will make it easier for that technician to re-produce the problem. If there are error messages, or error code numbers, write these down as well, word-for-word and don't spare the detail. The more information you provide, the easier it will be to repair.10) DON'T panic and assume the problem is always hardware related. The first thing that most service centres do is to test for a virus. Many virus imitate hardware problems. Once the possibility of a virus is eliminated

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