

The web scam customer service caper

Most conspiracy theorists, as far as I can tell, are fundamentally crazy. Nonetheless, I strongly suspect that customer service departments in large corporations are designed by an underground society of computers that want to drive us nuts so they can take over the world.



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

I did not make this up. My imagination is not that good. Probably using the real name of the company in question is not the best idea. I fear answering a knock on my door and being confronted by a computer and several of his henchmen wanting to have a word with me.

Okay. Let's just say I had a small issue with a company that offered an incentive program. You know the ones I'm talking about. After you buy a gazillion dollars worth of their products you build up hundreds of thousands of points. Each point was valued at one tenth of a Mexican peso when the peso was on par with the dollar.

I thought spending the points now, when one tenth of a peso is worth more than a U. S. dollar, would be a good thing.

The problem was, I forgot my password, which I thought could be easily retrieved. The only alternative to retrieving the password was to open a new incentive account. If I did that, I would lose my hundreds of thousands of points. Then I would have to wait another five years to be eligible for the do-it-yourself frontal lobotomy kit I had been looking forward to using for so many years.

The "contact us" heading on their website only gave an e-mail address. A telephone number was not listed. So I called the 1-800 number they advertised on television. The lady who answered was nice enough. She said, "My name is Agnes. I'm here to assist you in opening a new account. Please give me your credit card number now."

I asked if she could please connect me to customer service. She said, and very politely I

might add, "My name is Agnes. I'm here to assist you in opening a new account. Please give me your credit card number now." So I explained that I needed to retrieve my lost password. She said, "I'm sorry, I do not recognize that number. Please enter your credit card number on your telephone keypad now."

I could tell that Agnes was a telemarketer probably reading from a script. So I asked if I could speak to her supervisor. She didn't say anything for about ten seconds. I thought I was waiting for her supervisor when she came back on the line. "I'm sorry. I didn't get that number. Please stay on the line and someone will be with you shortly."

Shortly was about seven minutes. A man came on the line. "Good morning. You seem to be having trouble with our automated service. Could I please have your name and credit card number?" I said, "I'm trying to retrieve my password. Are you in customer service?" The man seemed puzzled. "I'm sorry. We don't have a customer service department. This is a fulfillment house. We only take orders."

I explained that I was trying to retrieve my password so I could cash in the points on my incentive plan. He asked what company I was trying to call. I told him the name of the company, and I could tell that he was covering the phone with his hand, but I distinctly heard him ask someone, "This man wants to retrieve his password for some company I never heard of. What do I tell him?"

The voice said, "Tell him to call this number. Maybe they can help him." Then he gave me a

number and hung up. So I called the number and a man answered. He didn't say "Hello," or "Good morning," or anything like that. He said, "Shipping." So I told him that I wanted to retrieve my password. I was obviously connected to the wrong department."

He said, "You don't need a password, you need a shipping number. Let me connect you with customer service. Give them your name and address and they'll look up your order." I didn't argue. I was finally going to get someone in customer service.

The person who answered had a very heavy accent I did not recognize. And she sounded as if she were speaking from another planet. I think she said, "May I have your name and address." I gave it to her and she said, "Just a minute while I pull up your account." I waited and when she came back on the line, she said that I had no shipments listed. I explained that I needed to retrieve my password.

She said, "We will never ask for your password. That is highly confidential." I said, "I'm not trying to give you my password. I want my password." She told me that she does not have this customer's password because she is not given that information. I admit I was starting to get frustrated. So I said, I don't think you understand English very well, and again asked her how I could retrieve my password.

She got very huffy and gave me a number to call where someone could help me. It was an 888 number. I thought I was finally getting somewhere when this voice answered. "My name is Agnes. I'm here to assist you in opening a new account. Please give me your credit card number now."

Agnes has a boss. It is a computer. It is the chairman of a company that hires people in countries all over the world who are not aware that they are working for a system they don't understand.

Island History

Continued from page 6

Newport junior and senior high schools.

From the Newport Daily News, September 13, 1958

The high ferry tolls, long a source of discouragement to tourists who bypassed Newport to take the longer highway route through Providence, will be sharply reduced or entirely eliminated if precampaign promises of candidates for office are followed.

Gov. Dennis J. Roberts, speaking to Jamestown voters at a Democratic dinner yesterday, renewed his backing of the oil refinery in Jamestown proposed by the Commerce Oil Refining Corp.

25 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, September 13, 1983

The General Assembly was back in Providence today. ... The largest bond issue, \$45 million, is earmarked for the Department of Transportation for replacing the Jamestown Bridge and other projects.

The race is on to see if the state can prop up the old Jamestown Bridge long enough to get the new one built. Monday night, Town Councilman Alton Head III prodded his colleagues to nudge the state to inspect and repair crumbling bridge piers while it tries to raise money to replace the span.

From the Newport Daily News, September 14, 1983

About 50 Jamestown residents and state legislators turned out at a public hearing Tuesday night on a proposed \$45 million bond issue, \$18 million of which is earmarked for the construction for the Jamestown Bridge project.

15 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, September 10, 1993

Faced with a water crisis that worsens daily, the Town Council Wednesday voted unanimously to ask the governor to declare a state of emergency on the island. The council, sitting as the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners in a second emergency session within eight days, also voted unanimously to ask the town of North Kingstown to provide Jamestown with 300,000 gallons of water a day.

Construction on the \$23 million cross-island highway has reached a point where, from the air at least, its path is clearly delineated.

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, September 10, 1998

Dutch Harbor's lobster habitat project got the attention of U.S. Sen. John Chafee this week. He spoke about the need to restore coastal habitats at a public conference held Tuesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the University of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island Sea Grant, all jointly responsible for the research being conducted on lobsters off Dutch Island.

Between now and Oct. 30, the state Department of Transportation will be accepting bids on five houses near Route 138 in Jamestown that are on the auction block. The houses — located at 14 Hull Ct, 12, 20 and 22 Hull St., and 7 Spindrift Dr. — were purchased by the state years ago because the yards were in the way of construction when the road was widened into a four-lane, limited access highway.



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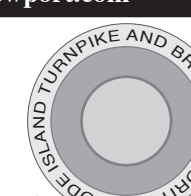
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