

Submission to the productivity commission

Subject: Right to repair

From: Luke Osborne

Topic: Right to Repair any consumer goods

I am a computer programmer, over the last twenty years my experience with home appliances and electronic equipment has been abysmal.

Washing machines, refrigerators, dryers etc. now fail on a regular basis. Now they are all controlled by tiny circuit boards and proprietary chips/software. Repair costs have skyrocketed, even when there is nothing physically wrong with the appliance if the tiny circuit board fails or something goes wrong with the onboard firmware then it often costs hundreds of dollars to replace. When you look at these circuit boards, they are using about three dollars' worth of components, it is a blatant rip off.

Printer ink is another area where consumers get gouged, you used to be able to use after market off brand ink cartridges, and order bulk ink and do your own refills. Now the printers are all microchipped to only recognise 'official' ink cartridges and block you refilling them. This has allowed printer companies to go from charging sub dollar a litre ink costs to above the cost of human blood per litre. It is insane and should be regulated.

My car ownership experience has been similar it used to be you could replace components easily, many companies made replacement parts and they were interchangeable and of high quality for a reasonable price. This is no longer the case with auto head units (audio) now coded to the specific car they came in (Subaru does this), being so tightly integrated with the vehicle as to be next to impossible to replace when they fail except with an original one from the manufacturer. The Subaru head units in this example have less features than an equivalently priced third-party unit but you really have no choice.

Similar with vehicle servicing only Subaru have the 'licensed' dealers with the correct computer equipment to access and set the internal computer software correctly after a service (so the lights stop beeping at you telling you it is time to change the engine oil for example). There are third part servicing options available but all of them are 'registered' with Subaru and charge similar prices (or I am sure they would lose access to their tools they need to service proprietary Subaru car firmware).

Mobile phones are another area, repairing them has become prohibitively expensive. You used to be able to replace a screen easily at your local third-party electronics repair shop. There were several brands of screens to choose from and they would all work. Now Apple lock you into their repair centres only, each replacement screen is encrypted and can only be installed by their service technicians who have the private keys to activate the screen. Third party repairs are dead for Apple devices. Samsung is heading down similar path. Phones should not be disposable, they should be fixable, easily and cheaply.

Regards

Luke