

Right to repair

Right to repair is an extremely important issue that reaches deep into the daily lives (and wallets) of all consumers. My input is that legislation must be enacted that preserves a buyer's right to have anyone he or she wishes to repair their products while maintaining that product's full original capability.

This means that once the product is purchased they should be able to take it to any repairer they choose, whether it's within the warranty period or not, for service and or repair. It's about preserving choice and not forcing the consumer to adjust their lifestyle and cost of ownership to the business model a supplier has chosen for their business.

Let me offer some examples from my personal experience.

I own a BMW automobile. Purchased it new nearly 19 years ago. After the expiration of the warranty period the only way in which I could get it serviced and have all the sensors reset to reflect that service was by taking it to BMW. Only they had the diagnostic equipment and training to do this. This is my third BMW and the only one that required this service model. And they have charged accordingly: about three to four times what I would normally have to pay. And my nearest BMW dealer is more than 100km from where I live. To this day I have continued to take my BMW to a local service centre. I'm confident of the service I receive, am more than pleased with the prices they charge and I don't have to drive very far for the service. However, they cannot reset the sensors so I have no confidence in what the sensors are indicating, and it's annoying to have them flashing red and warning me of something amiss when nothing actually is. Or maybe it is and I should be paying more attention?

I own a Dyson Cinetic Musclehead vacuum. Recently it lost suction. I am unable to take it to a local repair shop because no one has been trained, has the necessary tools, repair manuals or spare parts to repair it, so they won't even look at it. Further, even if I was able to deduce the problem I could not order a replacement part because Dyson does not offer these parts online. Instead, as the vacuum is still within its warranty period, I have had to contact Dyson's service centre (30 minutes out of my day every time I do it) and have them send me a shipping label to transport the vacuum to their repair centre in Sydney and then return it. That's at least three weeks without a vacuum!. And the local repair sites are dwindling as more and more go out of business. Further, if the vacuum was outside warranty I would have to go out and buy a new one. Where's the environmental sense in that?

I own several Apple computer products. I can get none of these repaired locally at Apple's authorized repairer as their advice is that things like screen breaks are so expensive to repair it turns out it's cheaper (they say) to just buy a new one. Further some parts are available only to Apple and Apple have chosen not share them even with authorized repairers.

As each industry learns how to force consumers into their business models ownership becomes more tenuous, service costs more expensive, obsolescence and its associated costs to the environment becomes more pervasive, and the benefits of competition are lost as well.

I'm all for a manufacturer introducing innovative products and services and having their intellectual property protected, but they have gone beyond the pale in the last 20+ years. Think not only the examples I've cited above, but also other new costs of ownership such as fees for services that firms like banks originally put in to reduce their own costs (think ATMs), or cloud computing which provides the tech companies the opportunity (through annual subscription based apps) to lock a customer into a single source relationship with escalating annual costs for capabilities that are of little or no direct benefit to anyone other than the provider beyond the old app purchase model, or electricity charges that are not only exorbitant but represent yet another revenue source to government through the fees electric companies to the government, or the annual fees gas providers charge in addition to the gas itself for such a nebulous thing like gas bottle maintenance when all they do is just replace them after a predetermined period of time. The list is fast becoming endless. Think John Deere (which I also own) and other agricultural manufacturers.

Think how many service centres are in danger of going out of business, or perhaps have already done so, when that used to be a vibrant part of every town's business profile.

Think of all the hidden monopolies that have sprung up because of these kinds of relationships. For a while there you could only buy certain power tool brands from Bunnings because they demanded they be the single seller of that particular power tool. You see a parallel of this when certain parts manufacturers sell certain parts only to Apple as a condition of their relationship with them and no one else.

I'm someone who decries government intervention more than most, but this is a situation that calls out for a remedy that only the government can provide. Oh, and don't leave it up to the states because we only need one solution, not several. It's nonsensical to consider how complex life would be if you moved from WA to SA or NSW and all your service options changed.