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-- Grayson Evans
The Training Dept.

PC Networks: Easy as 1, 2, 3^{4, 5, 6, 7...}

I'm on my 10th PC-networking product in two years, and I can't get this one to work, either. I've tried even the "user friendliest" of all home networking products and I'm still 0 for 10.

I've failed on every media (phoneline, RF, powerline and hardwired Ethernet), with every connection type (USB, serial, parallel port, PCI and PCMCIA), regardless of the software and, for that matter, the attentiveness of real-life tech supporters.

Is there something wrong with me? If so, then I'm in good company. Bill Rose, chairman of CEA's R7 home networking group, and former VP of engineering for Leviton, spent 20 hours trying to get a HomePNA network running in his home. To no avail, says Rose: "I called Linksys ('It's Dell's problem'), Dell ('It's Linksys' problem') and everyone else ('It's a Windows IRQ problem')."

Last week, Grayson Evans, proprietor of The Training Department, failed after two days to get *his* HomePNA network up and running.

Never mind that Evans has a Masters Degree in Computer Science from the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he also taught the craft. Despite his credentials, "I don't call myself an expert in computer networks," he says. So he *called* on a computer-networking expert who also couldn't figure it out.

"Any idea that a consumer could get this to work is so far out of reality that the whole industry needs to go to therapy," says Evans. "Somebody should take these guys to court for fraud."

The problem isn't necessarily any particular piece of software, hardware or protocol. The problem is the promise that anyone can "Just click to connect!"

I clicked so furiously that my 3Com HomeConnect Ethernet hub fell off the counter and broke. So I bought the even "better" 3Com Home Ethernet Gateway (\$159) because, "It's easy to connect!"

Blinded by the "three easy steps" that beckoned from the box front, I missed the four not-so-friendly footnotes hidden on the bottom.

Let's face it, the popularity of home networks and the rash of new products that presumably can be interconnected has made the home-networking environment ever more complicated for the consumer, despite real improvements in user interfaces, configuration wizards and tech-support lines.

Manufacturers of PC-networking products should please stop insulting remotely intelligent PC users by promising we'll be up and running in minutes.

Instead, they should work on business models that encourage professional technicians to install and support PC networks in the home. You can be sure that residential IT businesses like [Cybermanor](#) (Los Gatos, CA) are doing well, but there's not enough of them, and consumers don't know they exist.

Worse, we don't even know we need them!

If 3Com or Best Buy had told me in advance that it would take me eight hours to set up a home PC network, I would've called a professional before I opened the box.

Instead, I sit here embarrassed by my naivete, cursing the manufacturer and retailer that duped me.