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June 4, 2006

Sony Electronics Inc.  
1 Sony Drive  
Park Ridge, NJ 07656

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a loyal Sony customer. My television, VCR, DVD player, headphones, and the laptop computer on which I am writing this letter, all bear the Sony logo. The reason for this is that I have come to trust the Sony name after witnessing your products in use for several years, extrapolating from them during this time a sense of quality and of reliability, which so many of your customers value.

This letter concerns my laptop, a VAIO S-Series (Model No. VGN-S170B), which was purchased with an ATI MOBILITY RADEON 9700 graphics chipset for an extra fee. That particular chipset rendered the entire computer non-functional after the installation of Microsoft Windows XP Service Pack 2. It seems that the PCI-to-AGP bridge on the machine's original motherboard was somehow incompatible with Service Pack 2, for when I called technical support, my only option was to ship the entire computer back to Sony to have the motherboard replaced. This occurred in July, 2005. (Subsequently, I recommended an S-Series laptop to one of my clients, who ran into the same exact problem with a model two generations newer, putting a prompt end to any such further recommendations.)

Imagine my amazement when during a recent repair visit almost one year later, a Sony authorized technician removed my laptop's casing to replace the motherboard, revealing something startling. At once, I could read what was printed on the video chipset on the motherboard inside: "ATI MOBILITY RADEON 9200," with a sticker dated "7/29/05." The new motherboard brought along by the technician contained a similar chipset, but with the correct "9700" designation. It turned out that my latest round of problems with your machine was caused both by a faulty A/C adapter—inducing the power mode to spontaneously switch back and forth from A/C to battery at split-second intervals—and a poorly-designed ventilation system, causing the system to overheat regularly. The motherboard, ironically, was not at fault.

In other words, Sony charged me extra for a video card upgrade, which subsequently proved to be inherently defective, causing me to lose valuable work time. When I took the appropriate steps to remedy this problem, for which Sony was responsible (but not responsible enough to notify anyone), one of two things happened: Sony supplied me with a motherboard containing a microchip that had been somehow mislabeled by ATI upon its manufacture, or Sony replaced the defective hardware with less powerful hardware, and then tampered with either drivers or BIOS information to make it appear like the original, as the Windows Device Manager recognized it as "ATI MOBILITY RADEON 9700." While I have not been able to confirm either possibility with ATI thanks to their own less-than-stellar customer support, I can assure you that your own technical support representatives are worthless as diagnosticians, and I can think of no logical circumstance where a hardware vendor would intentionally label its chipsets



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incorrectly, and then make them *more* powerful than they appeared on the surface. (I realize that it is a common practice to intentionally “cripple” chipsets to sell tiered versions, such as the Intel 80486 DX vs. DX2 processor, but in this case, you somehow seem to be doing the opposite.) Even if this in an honest mistake, I believe that opening up the laptop’s case on my own voids the warranty. Had I not run into unrelated problems, how would I have even been able to tell that a mistake had even been made?

I do not know if it is your standard procedure to bait and switch customers when they have technical problems, but either way, I pay a premium on electronics precisely to avoid these kinds of situations. (See my letter to your Laredo Repair Center regarding my first DVD combo unit, which had the uncanny ability to freeze and corrupt video images as they played.)

In short, you have lost the once enthusiastic support of one more member of the computer industry. It may be a very long time before I ever purchase another Sony product again.

Sincerely,

Aaron Greenspan  
President & CEO  
Think Computer Corporation

