

In France, you can now get reimbursed for the MS Windows OS bundled with your computer when you purchase new equipment and claim that you would rather use another OS like Linux instead of being "forced" into using proprietary software.

France is again leading the way against borderline commercial practices of the computer industry. A few years ago, a powerful Consumer Rights Organisation (UFC - Que Choisir) filed a complaint against the largest consumer electronics retail chain in France (Darty). They claimed that the practice of bundling a proprietary OS with the hardware was a forced sale - which is illegal in France. It went to court and a judgement ruled that - although not strictly an illegal practice - a customer had a right to know what he pays for when purchasing a computer and also that the manufacturer should provide a reimbursement procedure for the software if the customer does not want to use it. Therefore, according to the court's ruling, the real price the customer will have to pay for the bundled software should be clearly mentioned on the price tag along with the retail price of that equipment.

As of now, most of the large retail outlets in France do show the OS price on the price tag and also mention that a reimbursement is possible.

Companies like Acer, Packard-Bell, Asus, Toshiba and Fujitsu are complying and offer a reimbursement procedure for MS Windows. Other companies like HP, Dell, Lenovo, Apple and Sony still refuse to comply. The amount you will get back could vary from €10 to €40 for Windows XP on a cheap notebook, to as much as €200 for the latest Pro/Ultimate versions of Windows on a high end desktop.

What annoys Microsoft and the hardware manufacturers the most, is that - because of this ruling - they now have to disclose the price they have secretly negotiated among themselves for pushing Windows with new equipment. Nobody really knew what those deals were, but now they have to disclose this publicly as it has to appear on the price tag.

As an example, one can consult this page on Acer's support site for France, which details the procedure for being reimbursed: <http://www.acer.fr/ac/fr/FR/content/remboursement> (in French).

There is hope that this policy will soon extend to many more EU countries.

G. Tournier