

AV-Comparatives



Support-Test (UK)

Test of English-Language Telephone Support Services
for Windows Consumer Security Software 2016

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Introduction

Given the numerous risks to be found on the Internet today, effective antimalware software is essential when going online. If a user is unable to install or activate their security program, or it is not working as expected, rapid help from an expert is called for. Arguably the quickest way of getting assistance is to pick up the phone and speak to one of the manufacturer's support agents. The aim of this review is to assess how quickly and effectively the English-language support services of 9 major vendors cope with typical questions.

This report was initially requested and commissioned by PCgo and PC Magazin Germany.

Vendors tested

We tested the services of the following major vendors, who offer English-language telephone support for users based in the United Kingdom:

- Avast
- Avira
- Bitdefender
- ESET
- F-Secure
- G Data
- Kaspersky Lab
- McAfee / Intel Security
- Symantec Norton

Please note that AVG, BullGuard, Emsisoft, eScan, Lavasoft, Panda, Quick Heal, Tencent, ThreatTrack and Trend Micro, did not provide telephone support for UK home users at the time of the test.

Factors considered in the test

We looked at the following questions for each of the support services:

- How easy is it to find the support phone number on the vendor's website?
- How long did the caller have to wait before being connected to a support agent¹?
- Was the support agent polite and professional²?
- Did the call result in the question being answered/problem being solved?
- What method did the support engineer use to solve the problem?

For the last question, we noted whether the support agent gave instructions over the phone, used remote control of the caller's PC, or sent instructions in an email. Whilst all three methods can be very effective, we regard the first two as being superior to emailed directions, as they require less interaction from the caller, and ensure that the problem has been solved there and then.

Questions asked

For each vendor, we made three separate calls with a different question each time, namely:

1. How do I schedule a scan?
2. How can I activate a trial version of the product with a licence key?
3. How can I reactivate disabled protection?

For the third question, we had deliberately disabled each program's real-time protection by editing a critical executable file, meaning that a repair installation, or uninstall/reinstall would be necessary to make the program function normally again.

Outstanding service

Four of the vendors tested provided outstanding service every time we called. These are (in alphabetical order): Avira, F-Secure, G Data and Symantec Norton. In all cases, their support staff provided effective solutions there and then, either by talking the user through the necessary steps on the phone, or by using remote control. Additionally, their support staff consistently impressed testers with their professionalism and courtesy.

¹ Calls made during office hours on workdays Monday to Friday. Call abandoned if not answered after 30 minutes' wait.

² This is inevitably somewhat subjective, and agents may be obliged to follow a company policy that might make them appear less than helpful.

Individual Vendors' Results

Avast

We had to wait 5 minutes for Avast to answer one of our calls, while the other two were answered in under a minute. The first two questions were answered efficiently by polite support staff who provided directions over the phone. Unfortunately, the problem of disabled protection was not resolved at all by the Avast agent who took the call. Having heard the tester read (once) the error message shown by the program, the agent immediately insisted that it was a Windows Update error, which Avast could only solve through their premium support service, which has to be paid for, even by users who have a valid subscription for a paid Avast product. We declined to pay additional charges for something that should be covered by a standard subscription, and regard the problem as unsolved by Avast support. Avast informed us that the agent concerned had been dismissed for other incidences of unprofessional behaviour before our report reached them.

Avira

All three of our calls to Avira were answered in under a minute. The respective support agents provided clear and effective instructions over the phone for entering a licence key and setting a scheduled scan, while the agent dealing with the disabled protection used remote control to take control of the PC and resolve the problem. Testers reported very polite and efficient service in all cases.

Bitdefender

A polite Bitdefender agent answered each of our calls in under a minute, and effective solutions were provided in all cases. The first two questions were answered by giving directions over the phone, while email instructions for uninstalling and reinstalling the product were provided to resolve the problem of disabled protection. These proved to be simple and effective.

ESET

Only one click is needed to find the support phone number on the ESET website. While one of our calls was only answered after 10 minutes, the other two were answered in a minute or less. ESET made the following comment on this: *"Although the 10 minute wait time is not a normal occurrence, there are times when the wait time is longer than the usual one or two minutes. This is due to our practice of never cutting calls short. Right now, the priority is to continue to grow the technical service team to further enhance the customer's experience"*. Agents were polite and efficient, and provided effective directions over the phone in all cases.

F-Secure

Two of our calls to F-Secure were answered in under a minute, although the average time was much reduced by the third call, which was not answered for over 15 minutes. Having got through, testers reported excellent service from very courteous agents. In all cases, our questions were resolved there and then by means of directions over the phone.

G Data

Finding the support phone number on the G Data website is particularly easy, with just one click on *Support* being needed. One call took three minutes to be answered, but the other two less than a minute each. Testers found very courteous and professional support agents who provided solutions there and then; a remote connection was used to solve the problem of disabled protection, while clear directions over the phone were provided for the other two questions.

Kaspersky Lab

All three of our calls to Kaspersky Lab Support were answered in under a minute by very polite and professional staff. The first two questions were answered there and then by directions over the phone, while an email with instructions for uninstalling and reinstalling the software was sent in the case of disabled protection. The instructions (with enclosed link to download the software) were simple and effective.

McAfee / Intel Security

At the time of the test, McAfee had the most complicated procedure for finding the support phone number, requiring multiple clicks/text entries. This has now been simplified, and the phone number can be reached with two or three clicks from the landing page. Calls were however answered quickly; under a minute in two cases, and three minutes in the third case. Testers reported very polite and professional support agents, and solutions provided were good. The first two questions were answered by providing directions over the phone, while an agent used remote control to rectify the disabled protection. A second phone call was necessary in this case, as the remote control session was not resumed after a restart; this slightly reduced the score we gave for the service.

Symantec Norton

Norton agents answered each of our calls in two minutes or less, and impressed testers with their very polite and effective service. In all cases, directions were provided over the phone; in the case of the disabled protection, the agent talked the tester through downloading and running a Norton tool that uninstalled and then automatically reinstalled the software. This was a simple and effective solution.

Vendor	Finding phone no.	Waiting time	Solving problem	Politeness	Method	Phone support times
Avast	++	++	0	0	Phone	24/7
Avira	0	++	++	++	Phone, remote	Not stated
Bitdefender	+	++	+	++	Phone, email	24/7
ESET	++	+	+*	++	Phone	Mon-Fri 8:30-18:30, Sat 9:00-17:00
F-Secure	+	+	++	++	Phone	Mon-Fri 9:00-18:00
G Data	++	++	++	++	Phone, remote	24/7
Kaspersky Lab	++	++	+	++	Phone, email	Mon-Fri, 8:00-17:30
McAfee / Intel	--	++	+*	++	Phone, remote	24/7
Symantec Norton	0	++	++	++	Phone	24/7

Key: + + Very Good; + Good; 0 Satisfactory; - Poor; -- Very Poor

Notes

- The table above shows the findings at time of testing.
- The table is sorted alphabetically according to vendor's name
- **Finding phone number:** how many clicks/steps are needed to find the support phone number on the vendor's website? ++ max 2; + max 4; 0 max 6; - max 8; -- more than 8. Some vendors clearly discourage users from calling their phone support, with inconspicuous links and/or complicated procedures
- **Waiting time (average):** how many minutes does the caller have to wait before speaking to a support agent? ++ max 3; + max 6; 0 max 9; - max 12; -- more than 12.
- **Solving problem (average of the three calls):** ++ problem solved completely during the call; + problem solved completely by email; 0 problem partly solved during the call; - problem partly solved by email; -- problem not solved. * = score downgraded as extra call needed, or tester felt that agent seemed technically uncertain.
- **Politeness and professionalism:** please bear in mind that this is inevitably rather subjective, and that a single + can be regarded as "very good".
- **Support method:** Phone = support agent provides instructions over the phone; Remote = support agent uses remote control; Email = agent sends instructions by email.
- **Phone support times:** phone support service hours according to vendor's website

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