

AV-Comparatives



Support-Test (Germany)

Test of German-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 German-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 German-language telephone support:

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

Please note that Avast, AVG, BullGuard, Emsisoft, Lavasoft, Panda, Quick Heal, Tencent, ThreatTrack and Trend Micro, did not provide German-language telephone support 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

Three of the vendors tested provided outstanding service every time we called. These are (in alphabetical order): Avira, eScan and Symantec Norton. In all cases, their support staff provided solutions there and then, either by talking the user through the necessary steps on the phone, or by using remote control. A fourth vendor, F-Secure, used emailed instructions in two cases, but still provided a very creditable service. All four helplines provided effective solutions, had minimal waiting times (two minutes or less), and support staff who 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

Avira

Calls to Avira's hotline were all answered in under two minutes. A message states that calls are *not* recorded. To resolve the problem of disabled protection, the support agent talked the tester through a repair installation. The other two questions were also answered there and then over the phone. Testers noted very efficient, polite and professional service in all cases. We would describe Avira's telephone support overall as outstanding.

Bitdefender

Bitdefender had the longest average waiting time, at over 13 minutes. Callers can opt out of call recording, although a subsequent message nonetheless states that calls *will* be recorded. Instructions for uninstalling and reinstalling the product were emailed by the support agent to resolve the problem of disabled protection, while the other two questions were answered over the phone. Testers found all Bitdefender support agents courteous and professional, although one had to ask a colleague how to set a scheduled scan.

eScan

eScan takes joint first place for ease of finding the support phone number (only one click needed) and also for waiting-time, with all three calls being answered in under a minute. Questions relating to product activation and scheduling a scan were answered immediately over the phone, with testers describing the service as "very efficient". As regards disabled real-time protection, the eScan support agent used remote control to thoroughly investigate the system and resolve the problem. The tester described the support agent as "very polite, dedicated and helpful". Overall, we found eScan's German-language telephone support service to be outstanding.

ESET

We had to make 4 calls to ESET's support helpline; we abandoned the first call after waiting for 30 minutes with no answer. The three successful calls were answered in an average of under 5 minutes. ESET commented: *"We accept that 30 minutes is too long for a response. The internal investigation of ESET customer care calls referred to an improper spike in time of call handling. The implementation of a new system for ESET customer care service is already under way and will effectively enhance the peak-time call handling capabilities in the near future."* A remote connection was used to resolve the problem of disabled protection, while answers to the other two questions were answered immediately over the phone. Testers praised the courtesy and dedication of ESET support staff, but questioned whether they had been given adequate technical training; agents seemed unsure of how to find the Windows version, or set a scheduled scan, requiring assistance from colleagues for the latter. ESET made the following comment on this: *"The first line responders, who are not technical experts but who are specially trained to treat customers with courtesy and dedication and to fix general questions, handle all incoming calls. Whenever specialist or technical questions arise, our 2nd line specialists are involved."*

F-Secure

F-Secure's helpline answered all three calls in under a minute. Emails with instructions were sent to resolve the problem of disabled protection, and to answer the question regarding product activation. The question relating to scheduling a scan was answered directly over the phone. Testers reported very polite and professional support staff in all cases. Overall, we would describe F-Secure's German-language support service as excellent.

G Data

G Data's support number can easily be found on their website with just one click. However, we had to call it 4 times, as our first call was met with a message that the service was currently unavailable and that we should call back later. The average waiting time for the three successful calls was a little over six minutes. The G Data agent dealing with the disabled protection problem sent an email with instructions for uninstalling and reinstalling the product, while the other two questions were answered over the phone. One agent we spoke to appeared to be unsure how to check the Windows version, but in all three calls the testers described the G Data agents as polite, professional and dedicated.

Kaspersky Lab

Average waiting time for calls to Kaspersky was a creditable 2 minutes. A message states that calls will be recorded, but the caller can opt out of this. The questions regarding scheduled scan and product activation were answered efficiently over the phone, with a tester noting "very polite" service. Unfortunately, the problem with disabled protection was not resolved; the agent promised to send an email with instructions for uninstalling and reinstalling the product, but this did not arrive.

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. Average call waiting time was under 2 ½ minutes. A message states that all calls will be recorded, with no means of opting out. The disabled real-time protection was resolved effectively by the support agent, who emailed instructions for uninstalling and reinstalling the product. Configuration of a scheduled scan was explained over the phone; the tester noted "very polite and efficient service". The question of how to activate a trial version of the product was resolved partly over the phone, and partly by further instructions sent by email.

Symantec Norton

Calls to Norton's helpline were all answered in under two minutes. A message states that calls will be recorded, but the caller can opt out of this. The Norton support agent used a remote connection with chat to resolve the disabled protection issue, while both the other questions were answered there and then over the phone. Testers praised "very efficient" and "very professional" service. We rated Norton's German-language support overall as outstanding.

Vendor	Finding phone no.	Waiting time	Solving problem	Politeness	Method	Phone support times
Avira	0	++	++	++	Phone	Mon-Thu 8:30-19:30; Fri 9-19:30
Bitdefender	0	--	+	++	Email, phone	Mon-Fri 9-19
eScan	++	++	++	++	Phone, remote	Not stated
ESET	0	0*	++	+	Phone, remote	Mon-Fri 8-17
F-Secure	+	++	+	++	Email, phone	Mon-Fri 9-19
G Data	++	-*	+	++	Email, phone	24/7
Kaspersky Lab	++	++	0	+	Email*, phone	Mon-Fri 9-17
McAfee / Intel	--	++	+	++	Email, phone	Mon-Fri 9-18
Symantec Norton	0	++	++	++	Phone, remote	Mon-Thu 9-20; Fri 9:30-20

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. *Score downgraded by one level if an additional call is needed due to service unavailable (G Data) or wait time > 30 minutes (ESET).
- **Politeness:** please bear in mind that this is inevitably rather subjective, and that a single + can be regarded as “very good”.
- **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
- **Support method:** Phone = support agent provides instructions over the phone; Remote = support agent uses remote control; Email = agent sends instructions by email. * = instructions supposed to be sent by email but did not arrive.
- **Phone support times:** phone support service hours according to vendor's website

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