

POST OFFICE ACCOUNT

FAD : 153405 Cleveleys Runnymede Ave, Thornton Cleveley, Lancs, FY5 1DF

Review of Expert Witness Report : Claim CR101947

Report received 6th February from POL. Written by Jason Coyne from Best Practice Group plc. Law Society 2003 Accredited Expert Witness No. 229.

Background

POL have been in dispute with PM of this Outlet since mid 2000. Essentially, POL had made a claim against the PM for losses at the Outlet, against which she had counter-claimed that the problem was caused by the Horizon system and she was refusing to release the equipment as she believed an examination of it would vindicate her. A Court Order was made on 19th February 2003 that a computer expert examine the equipment.

POA's first involvement was a request made 8th August 2003 by POL that we provide a Witness Statement "about the Horizon equipment and what it contains (or doesn't) and give Mrs W a chance to object". POL wanted the Court to overturn the Court Order so that POL could recover the equipment.

On 20th August a fax was received from POL explaining the situation and requesting a Witness Statement to the effect that there was nothing on the equipment that would assist the PM in her claim and that it should be returned.

The following day I replied, by email, stating that I was loathe to produce a Witness Statement at this stage but explaining what information existed on the equipment, what would happen if it was switched on and that we would not allow 3rd parties access. I also explained how we could help POL. I received no reply to this email.

On 6th February POA received a copy of the Expert's report with a request from POL for an early response. POL are concerned that the Expert's opinion (that the system was at fault) might set a precedent against future POL prosecutions.

The Expert's Opinion

Taking each opinion as it occurs in the report I would offer the following by means of explanation, confirmation or refutation.

'Reasonableness' of calls to HSH

The Expert was unable to make direct comparisons between similar Outlets due to the absence of records. While this was true of audit data formally available to POL, POA are able to review an unregulated archive of records of the other installed 6 Counter Outlets over a comparable period. The table below shows the output from that analysis :

FAD	PO Name	Install Date	Total Calls	A	F	H	I	K	M	N	O	S	T	X	Y	Z	%Non A&G	% Soft
005323	Headingly	06/10/99	74	20		5		7			3	27	4	6		2	73%	36%
005715	Dungannon	18/10/99	25	8		2				1	1	10		3			68%	40%
009116	Halstead	28/09/99	16	3		1				1	1	7	1	2			81%	44%
013613	Haverfordwest	04/11/99	48	7		8	4			2	2	22		3			85%	46%
153405	Cleveleys [1]	09/02/00	101	15	1	6		5	1	5	1	35	2	14	16		85%	35%
153405	Cleveleys [2]	09/02/00	85	15	1	6		5	1	5	1	35	2	14			82%	41%
176323	Armley	13/10/99	87	23		8	2	4			7	29	1	12			74%	33%
185611	Penarth	08/10/99	58	15		5		1			3	15	2	14			74%	26%
250704	Yorkgate	24/09/99	32	5				4			3	16	1	3			84%	50%
292323	Otley	07/10/99	34	10		1	2	5			1	11	2	2			71%	32%
333427	Darwen	21/10/99	55	13		8	6	2		1	5	13	3	3			76%	24%
345432	Wilmslow	25/10/99	29	4		2		6			4	7		6			86%	24%
431614	Colwyn Bay	05/11/99	89	19		2	7	3			2	38	5	13			79%	43%

Call Type	Legend
A	Advice and Guidance
F	Reference Data
H	Hardware
I	Implementation
K	Cash Account
M	Customer Complaint
N	Network
O	Operational
S	Software
T	Training
X	Other
Y	Rollout Helpdesk
Z	Security

Discounting Rollout Helpdesk calls, which should have not been addressed to the HSH, it can be said that in terms of total calls made (3rd highest from 12), %ge that were non Advice & Guidance (4th highest) and the %ge that were Software based (5th highest), Cleveleys numbers are broadly comparable with the group of Outlets.

To draw any firm conclusions as to why this is would require judgement over the capabilities of the staff in the first place, correct operation of the equipment, effectiveness of the training programme and the extent to which the Cleveley's staff resorted to the HSH at the first opportunity.

Statement by Ms Elaine Tagg

A total of 101 HSH calls were raised between 09/02/00 (install date) and 20/11/00 (termination date) of which 15 are classified as Advice and Guidance and 16 are to do with the Rollout itself. Based on the analysis, and without analysing each and every call record it would be hard to dispute the opinion of the Expert.

Operator advice to 'Reboot'

The HSH operates under a strict Service Level Agreement covering aspects such as pick-up time, first time fix, and time to close. These measures are imposed by Post Office Ltd and are designed to ensure that PMs receive a quick response to their call and, to the extent possible over the 'phone, a timely return to normal business operations. To re-boot is the quickest way to return the Outlet to normal working.

In this context the opinion of the Expert, that "this instruction treats the effect and not the cause" is correct.

However, it would be incorrect to assume that no further work is carried out by POA to address the various blue screen/system freeze/screen lock problems. Regular maintenance updates are made to address these problems within the normal Release programme.

Summary : Defective Equipment

The criticism that the technology installed at Cleveleys was 'clearly defective' is subjective and based on the raising of 70 HSH calls over a 10 month period. There is no attempt to substantiate the claim nor to draw any comparisons with external benchmarks.

Summary : Closing Calls

It is true that the HSH is targeted at returning Outlets to normal working as fast as possible and are not in a position to analyse system error messages displayed on screens. This is governed by Service Level Agreements instigated and monitored by Post Office Ltd.

Summary : Worrying Discrepancies

It is difficult to comment on the statement made by the Expert in this part of the Summary although he is alluding to the fact that system errors may be responsible for this.

This argument has been put forward by a number of PMs in the past when challenged and prosecuted by POL for alleged fraudulent behaviour and each time it has fallen when confronted by transaction data that demonstrates that the system was operating normally during the disputed time period.