

# Non-Generic Keyboards

Saturday, 15 July 2006

This site is rapidly becoming Martin's rant about life. Today Ladies and Gentlemen we are looking at Non-Generic Keyboards.

The invention of the modern computer keyboard began with the invention of the typewriter. Christopher Latham Sholes patented the typewriter that we commonly use today in 1868. The Remington Company mass marketed the first typewriters starting in 1877.

This design was later incorporated into an all manner of devices, from punchcard machines to DEC terminals. In 1981 IBM released the first PC and with it a standard keyboard design. This design has changed little over the years and can be found on most moderns keyboards.

That is until the mid 1990s. Since then average Joe has drawn himself into the computing world, bucket and spade in hand. Everyone and their dog has a pc, or, more importantly, the Internet (it's just a series of tubes).

Now, I'm not against anyone learning a new field, the more people interested in PCs the better, but this has had an undesirable side-affect. The number of PC users has grown rapidly and with them they have brought an all number of companies selling fancy, gimmicky, badly built, tacky, trashy hardware.

People like gadgets and companies know this. If keyboard A has 105 keys and keyboard B has 104 the unknowing user is likely to purchase keyboard A with the extra key. After all, it might be useful right? NO!

For anyone in any doubt of what a UK keyboard should (roughly) look like here is a diagram:

The reason I'm so against change, particularly in keyboards, is that my brain is wired to use them as they are. After many, many years of using keys in the same position my brain has hard-wired macros that help me navigate the keyboard faster. It's a bit like riding a bike, if someone moved the pedals to the rear and added a second set at the front for a 2nd gear you'd probably be rather dismayed.

I recently took a trip to PC World to find myself a new keyboard and was unable to locate one adhering to the standard layout above. Some of them had moved keys, some added, some removed and some with additional modifiers. Unbelievable.

I have in the past hit the Insert key on a keyboard only to find it going into Standby mode. Some PCs do not recover well from Standby and this might necessitate a reboot. At this point I'm likely to make a blog entry about the sheer stupidity in moving standard keys to make way for useless ones. Note to keyboard designers, a standby button goes ON THE FRONT OF THE PC, not on the keyboard.

Well, this rant is going nowhere. I'm sure you get the jist of things. All I can ask is when you're next looking to purchase a keyboard please make sure it adheres to the standard above. The only way to stop companies producing trashy hardware is if people stop buying it.

Death to the Start key.