

Fax Friend

A perennial problem for those with only one telephone line is how to ensure correct detection of incoming

If messages for the telephone, an answering machine, a scanning fax machine, and perhaps a fax/modem as well. Many home and SOHO PC users face this difficulty, despite claims of built-in arbitration with devices which often don't seem to work satisfactorily.

Fax Friend, from Avro Pacific, is a well advertised little piece of electronics that claims to take care of all this, so I've been trying one out. Its cost should be set against the fact that BT will charge you £116 (inc VAT) to install a new line that you might dedicate to the fax machine, and then £24.78 (inc VAT) a year for rental. In comparison, the cost of a device like Fax Friend starts to look quite reasonable.

My particular SOHO setup has all the items mentioned above, and of three telephones, one is on the scanning fax machine and one is cordless. The maximum REN (Ringer Equivalence Number) you're allowed per line is unlikely to be a problem. The total permitted is four, and Fax Friend uses only half of one. Not only that, but any devices plugged into the switched line, number two, take up no RENs at all because it's passive until automatically activated. That's where your fax machine or fax/modem will be run from, so they don't count in the total.

In White plastic, and just 130x77x35mm, Fax Friend looks neat. With two BT phone sockets and a mains-transformed 9v input at one end, an adequately long lead at the other to plug into your main phone socket, and an activity LED on the labelled top side, the device is ready to go. Conveniently, it also bears twin sticky feet, by means of which you could, if you wished, attach the device to a wall.

With only line two being switched by the electronics, it means that if you have both scanning fax and fax/modem they should both be plugged into this socket, and a T-piece twin outlet, obtainable at modest cost, caters for that. Into line one you could plug a telephone or perhaps an answering machine. Other telephone extensions can be tapped off ahead of Fax Friend. It doesn't matter to them where it's situated; they will all work normally. The device comes with an instruction sheet in the form of a wall chart. This outlines all - well, most - of the possible combinations of gear you might have to get working in harmony together, and I found Avro Pacific helpful in getting my particular setup working to the optimum. I say 'optimum' because, in the end, there might be just the odd situation Fax Friend cannot cope with to your total satisfaction. My only difficulty, which I could live with quite easily, was due to having one of two separate fax devices to operate, only one of them switched on, but both plugged into Fax Friend - a fairly unusual scenario perhaps.

If I set up the fax/modem for auto-reception, the phones continued to ring while the fax was received. Reception was otherwise perfect, nevertheless.

The scanning fax machine worked normally, answering an incoming fax after just one ring, and arbitrating correctly. Generally, I use the scanning fax machine for automatic fax reception, reserving the fax/modem for most transmissions, especially word processor output.

Dip switches on Fax Friend control, first, the number you can dial on your telephone to transfer calls to your fax machine if you need to. Another arbitrates between fax machine and answering machine, while two other dip switches control the ring counting function by means of which you can vary the number of rings allowed before switching takes place.

Fax Friend is a must-have utility for those who have telephones, fax machine, answer phones and so on, to run from a single telephone line. It features remote control of the fax machine from any extension where necessary, all extensions ringing as normal, no interference with outgoing calls of any type, auto-dial and toll-saver compatibility (though not call-forwarding). In short, probably a whole lot better than the built-in arbitration your current devices will have fitted, and far cheaper than installing a second phone line.

FACTS BOX

Product:

Fax Friend

From:

Avro Pacific Ltd
Avro Pacific
Stainton Way
Stainton, Middlesbrough
Cleveland TS8 9DF
(or BT or PC shops)

Tel:

01642 595000

Fax:

01642 590492

Price:

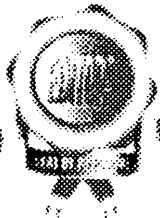
£58.69 (£49.95+VAT)

Rating:

10



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