

## Computer Recovery and Drivers Disks

From AskLeo.com (great free newsletter)

“Hey Leo, I just bought a new laptop and I was very disappointed when I found out that my computer didn't have any drivers or [cd-roms](#). As a consumer, can I demand to the manufacturer to send me a copy of the cd-roms system back up? I read about the c:\i386 but I feel like I should have a copy of the system without having to make a copy myself ... am I correct on this?”

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The only *right* you have as a consumer is the right to take your business elsewhere if you don't like the practices or service of the vendor you're using. The vendors are actually under no *obligation* to give you CDs in addition to what's pre-installed on your system, as long as they didn't somewhere state that they would. As we've seen in recent years, they often don't, presumably as some kind of cost cutting measure.

That being said, there's at least one potential confusion in your question that I want to clear up, and before you walk away from your vendor some alternatives that I'd encourage you to pursue.

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You indicated that "I found out that my computer didn't have any drivers" - I'm going to assume that you mean that it didn't come with a CD of the drivers. Your computer almost certainly *did* come with drivers, already installed as part of the pre-installed operating system. What might be missing is a CD or other installation media that you could use should you ever need to reinstall from scratch.

"Your computer almost certainly did come with drivers, already installed ..."

There are potentially three different types of media that accompany a new PC:

- **Windows Setup Disc** - this is a disk from which you can setup Windows from scratch, onto an empty hard drive if need be. When present, this disk may also already contain the drivers required for your specific machine. Many manufacturers fail to include this CD, though I firmly believe that it should always be included.
- **Rescue or Recovery Disc** - this disc does **not** contain the operating system and cannot be used to [reinstall](#) it from scratch. Rather, this disc typically contains software that can be used to recover the operating system from information such as the C:\i386 folder or a recovery partition

on the hard disk. It may also include additional recovery and repair tools, and/or the drivers specific to your machine.

- **Driver Disc** - this disc, if present, typically contains only the driver software that is unique to your machine or your manufacturer. The combination of a generic [Windows installation](#) disc plus this disc would allow you to [install Windows](#) and all the drivers for your machine.

It's rare that a manufacturer won't include one or the other of the last two discs.

As I've advised before, should you find yourself without all of the above, particularly the Windows installation disc, you should make an image backup of your entire machine as soon as possible. This would serve as your re-installation "media" should you ever need to reformat and reinstall.

I have mixed feelings on drivers, though, particularly if you've purchased your machine from a larger vendor that makes their drivers available online.

*Even if I have the disc with the original drives I'll often use a re-install as the perfect time to make sure I have the *latest* drivers anyway. That means, essentially, acting as if I didn't have them, and downloading the latest versions from the manufacturer. Of course, I then save those as well, should I need them again in the future.*

In a nutshell, then, my advice is as follows:

- When purchasing a machine, always specify that you want the Windows installation media included, even if it's an extra cost option.
- If your machine arrives with Windows preinstalled, but without installation media, take a full image backup as soon as possible, and save that as your reinstallation media for future use.
- When it comes time to reinstall Windows, consider getting the latest machine-specific drivers online from your machine's vendor, whether or not you have a disc with the originals.
- Always remember that if you're unhappy with a vendor, you have every right to take your business elsewhere.