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Family Affairs Newsletter Feedback 2008-03-17

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More than two decades ago I was employed as a technician for the Hampden Telephone Company, a small, independent, family-owned phone company here in Maine. As a technician I: assembled/installed/repaired telephones, installed/repaired phone wiring inside the house, installed/troubleshoot/repaired underground phone wiring, installed/troubleshoot/repaired aerial wires, did the necessary cross-wiring and connecting inside the switching office, did the necessary cross-wiring and connecting at special outdoor junction centers, programmed the computer switch, climbed telephone poles in all seasons and all weathers, did all the associated record keeping, ran the repair van and the bucket truck and the backhoe and the cable burying machine, was responsible for the electrical power installation, and got to make dump runs to the transfer station. All six technicians who worked for the company were expected to do all that, with the exception of two guys who, because of their seniority and age and the fact that they were members of the family who owned the company, were spared some of the more rigorous jobs.

One day as we were chatting at lunch, one of the other technicians shook his head and said: "You know, when you consider all of the literally hundreds of software and hardware components and all of the hundreds of wiring connections that are needed to make a single phone call, and when you understand that if any one of those hundreds of things goes wrong your phone call won't go through, then you realize that the motto of the phone company ought to be: IT'S A WONDER IT WORKS AT ALL !!!"

I thought folks would respond to the poll and tell me either that the cut-and-paste posting could or couldn't be opened. Instead, only 25 folks felt that their newsletter arrived "just fine" (and most of them seemed to be MAC users ... though not all MAC users had great results). There were another 75 people or so who had a variety of problems. Then there were another 400+ readers who didn't respond to the question at all (which is usual). Anyway, this is what I got:

The attachments were in the body of the email but couldn't be opened.

All the attachments arrived at the end of the email but couldn't be opened.

The attachments arrived somewhere in the email but only one or two could be opened.

No attachments arrived at all.

Only the attachments arrived, no newsletter.

Some folks got 3 attachments, some folks for 5 or 6 attachments!

Some folks got the newsletter, no attachments, with the print about 1/3 the usual size.

Some folks got the newsletter, no attachments, with the print twice the normal size.

Some folks just got a white (blank) newsletter.

Some folks just got a black newsletter with hyperlinks in blue that didn't go anywhere.

Some folks got the newsletter (colors and everything) and then a second newsletter in plain text (black and white) at the end of the first.

Some folks didn't get the newsletter at all.

Some folks had wildly different margins that required scrolling left to right.

Some folks had hieroglyphics mixed in with the text.

Some folks got a newsletter with no colors.

Then I realized that:

With all of the different formats and ways that exist for creating pictures and cut-and-paste notices,
With all of the different computer makes and models and hardware and ages,
With all of the different programs, and all the different versions of the different programs,
With all of the different program platforms,
With all of the various levels of program upgrades which people may or may not have kept up with over the years,
With all of the different internet service providers with all of their differing levels and formats for security and info delivery,
And with all the different levels of computer literacy in the general population,

IT'S A WONDER WE CAN GET A NEWSLETTER AT ALL !!!

I wish I could promise you a beautiful, colorful, artfully composed, email newsletter with photos and links and creatively designed postings that would look and act exactly the same for everyone ... but I can't. I guess there's something to be said for print media after all, huh? At least everyone who picks up a copy of National Geographic is going to see the same thing. But I'm NOT a computer wizard, and I don't have the time, desire, or money to become one. I'm going to try to give you a newsletter that has the information and can be read by most people (whether it shows up in your email box the way I intend it to or not).

So I'm going back to the old K.I.S.S. principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid). From now on The FAN will have NO photos or graphics or cut-and-paste enhanced postings. If folks want to post text that uses various fonts, font sizes, colors, and spacing, that will be fine (even though it's clear that even those doesn't always translate correctly between computers). If the choice is between a fancy but unreadable newsletter and a plain but readable one, I figure you all would prefer the readable one.

For those folks who receive their copies of The FAN with type that is too large or too small: please know that somewhere on most computers there is a way for you to make the printing that shows up on your monitor either larger or smaller. Sometimes it's in the "View" menu, sometimes in the "Format" menu, or you can go to the "Help" menu and type in "Font size" and see what comes up.

NOW ... since so many folks apparently didn't get a readable form of the MAR 15 issue of The FAN, I'm going to redo it (in KISS format) and send it out again. It will probably be in your email box by this evening.

Love,
Jean Vermette
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