

“I’m Too Busy To Read”

Last month I received a call from a cleaner in response to an ad for a product I regularly advertise in this publication. He said he had seen the ad a number of times before and was finally ready to place an order. The product I sell has applications in a variety of industries so during the course of our conversation the caller asked if I actually knew anything about drycleaning or was I just a newcomer to the industry.

When I said I’d been actively involved since 1980 and that I’ve submitted an article to this publication every month for more than 6 years there was a brief moment of silence.

“What’s your name?” he asked. “I’ve been reading this paper every month for years... who are you?”

I told him but sensed no immediate recognition so, in desperation I said, “Go to page 26. See the guy at the top? That’s me.”

At that moment I was overcome with questions. “How can a guy flip through the pages of this publication every month for years and not recognize the same recurring face and name? Does he need an eye exam or is he just too busy to read?”

A few days later, some of my questions were answered while watching a TV program that highlighted the age of technology we’re all living in right now.

It’s hard to say exactly when it all started, but sometime during the past ten years, most of us involuntarily surrendered a big chunk of our lives to computers, and to other networking devices that contain computer chips. We’re talking laptops, desk tops, cell phones, BlackBerrys, PDAs, and remote controls. I short, I’m referring to anything that needs to be programmed, requires technical support, and can crash, die, or merely freeze.

All the gadgets we possess (with the exception of my iPhone, which is extremely easy to run) require instruction manuals to program and operate. These wonders of technology aren’t always as intuitive as they once were. In times past, it was simple to look at the screen and just “figure it out.” Now you have to read the manual and who wants to do that?

Get me a pimple-faced nerd... someone who stays at home on Saturday nights and reads stuff like that so I don’t have to. After all, I’m too busy to read!

To make matters worse, however, this age of technology has given rise to a whole new world of writers, publishers and entrepreneurs... experts on everything from fruit flies to space flight. In fact, anyone with a keyboard and an Internet connection now has the ability to reach thousands of people worldwide in an instant.

The result of all this is that the body of information on any subject matter you can name is increasing exponentially each and every day. It’s no wonder my phone caller didn’t recognize my name or face. He probably skims each issue in a matter of minutes and jots down a few notes of interest before moving on to the next order of business in his harried day.

Recently, I’ve come to realize that I’m too busy to read, as well. My new quest for simplicity has led to a strong dislike for news and information that’s pushed at me all day long such as RSS feeds, blogs and pod casts of every flavor. I still check my email every 5 or 10 minutes throughout the day but the rest of it has just become too much to process.

April 15th is right around the corner and Turbo Tax is on the shelf at almost every retail store. For some people, doing it themselves is the way to go, but I’ve long since cut out the learning curve along with all the reading it takes by hiring a very capable accountant.

In addition, I'm no longer tempted by any of the do-it-yourself books I see online or at my local Borders.

I suppose I could learn to repair my own car. After all, I still have a very shiny 300-piece Craftsman toolset I bought about 20 years ago, but today's new cars require special computer diagnostics and... NO! I'm not going there. I'll let my mechanic take care of it. I'm too busy to read.

Spring is in the air and my wife has decided she'd like a new deck. Lately, her time spent viewing HGTV has convinced her that it wouldn't be that difficult an undertaking and that we could even save a lot of money by doing it ourselves. Uh-uh. I'm not learning to be a carpenter at this stage of my life. I don't have the energy and besides... I'm just too busy to read.

About a month ago I got a call from a local brick paver and landscaper. A drycleaner friend of mine had referred him to me suggesting I would be able to help him with a comprehensive, full-scale marketing campaign. He was anxious to get a jump on the season and wanted to have everything in place to launch ahead of his competitors.

During the course of our initial conversation, he mentioned that he had begun to research what he needed to promote his business and was pretty confident in his ability to carry through but, in the end, he said, "I'm just too busy to read."