

## Re: DTV antennas?

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- *From:* Jeff Liebermann <jeffl@xxxxxxxxxx>
  - *Date:* Thu, 17 Jul 2008 15:59:44 -0700
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On Thu, 17 Jul 2008 09:36:22 -0700, "Joel Koltner"  
<zapwireDASHgroups@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

"Jeff Liebermann" <jeffl@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote in message  
[news:idjt74lqkr1amea1kpgsolm8cit15ro5c2@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:news:idjt74lqkr1amea1kpgsolm8cit15ro5c2@xxxxxxxxxx)

Incidentally, I've been told that about 90% of tech support questions are answered in the documentation or web pages. That implies the 90% of the customer base has some form of written or on-screen learning or communications problems.

I don't think that necessarily follows. Plenty of times people have problems because...

- 1) They don't *\*think\** to read the documentation/web pages

How about they can't find the documentation to read? Ever try to actually read the help files? I mean linearly start at one end and read to the other end. It's not easy, rough reading, totally disjointed, and fairly difficult. Yet, the few users that actually tried the built in help did exactly that. They expected it to read exactly like the printed documentation and were instantly lost when confronted with something different. Similarly, the documentation on disk is often difficult to find and use. I recently installed some wireless card that had the docs on disk. The problem was that I had to slog my way through 2 splash screen, several "click here to do something obvious", and a list of obscure menu choices on a garish page, in order to get to the docs. To insure failure, the search feature would only work on single words.

My guess(tm) is that most of the called did try to find or use the help, but failed.

- 2) They don't *\*want\** to read the documentation/web pages

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Well, I don't want to read the docs either. In fact, I don't. I consider it a personal disgrace to need to read the docs. If the product were any good, it wouldn't need any docs. My customers also fail to appreciate the merits of me reading the docs in their presence. The usual question is "do you know what you're doing?" implying that reading the docs is somehow a mark of technical ineptitude. Until we find a way to eliminate the stigma from reading the docs, NOBODY is going to read them.

3) The documentation/web pages are so poorly arranged that it's difficult to find the information

I have quite a few opinions on this topic. I'll supply just one observation. Manuals that are full of illustration and examples work far better than big thick wordy creative writing projects. In other words, a picture is literally worth 1000.0 words.

What has happened in my chequered past is that the docs mirror the personality of the tech writers. If the writers have a military background, the docs will resemble at military field manual with lots of decimal numbered sections, huge parts lists, monstrous indexes, and very little in between. If the writer has a flair for illustration, it will resemble a picture book or cartoon book. If the writer has a classical education, it will be as if Shakespeare had written the instructions.

Worse, it is literally impossible to scribble a manual that will satisfy everyone. I previously had an old cartoon from Mad Magazine on my office wall. It was a scene from a TV drama, as edited by all those involved in the production. All were radically different and slanted in the preferred direction of the author. There was also a similar cartoon in EDN(?) magazine, showing a child's swing, and the various ways different engineering and field service departments butchered it into something useless.

The same applies to the target audience of a manual. If you're writing for a couch potato, with a grammar skool education, the copy is not going to make a professional programmer very happy. Similarly, targeting the programmer, is going to make the manual unintelligible to Joe SixPack. I have some ideas on how to partially solve this dilemma, but that can wait for another rant.

I've listed these in what I think is the order of frequency.

I don't have enough experience playing support to do the same. However, I once had access to the support logs from a rather large

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domestic support organization. I vaguely recall that reading the manual to the customer over the phone was a common activity, which implies that they either didn't have the manual, didn't want to read the manual, or couldn't understand the manual. I have no numbers to separate the probable causes.

That being said, we've still come a long way where, today, pretty much anyone can sit down at a PC and create a document with various fonts, typefaces, colors, margins, graphics, etc. in on time flat compared to the old days of, e.g., DOS WordPerfect 5.1.

Agreed. I still occasionally use vi and nroff for word processing, but am slowly switching over to GUI based processors. Many years ago, I challenged a fast typist to a race between her using MS Word 97 and me using vi, nroff, spell, and such. We picked 5 formatted pages of text from a book and started typing. She was faster on the typing, but I caught up when it came time to format and print the result. I lost because I had to lookup a few nroff dot commands. Both were full of mistakes but that was to be expected.

What has really happened is that the users of function key driven word processors (IBM Displaywriter, WordPerfect) and <ctrl> key driven word processors (Wordstar), have been displaced by GUI driven word processors. Back in the days when there was still somewhat of a choice, various tests showed the GUI driven variety to be the slowest, most error prone, but easiest to learn, of the bunch. Whether this constitutes an improvement, is subject to debate.

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