

The Old Codger Writes

In my circles, I am proud to be known as a dodderly old fart who cannot understand this sudden rush to make things smaller to give them more features, and be better than 'brand X'. Or the current thinking that just because you don't have something, you are somehow a second-class citizen.

Take this stupid idea that we are to all have 'digital television' by the time the Olympics start/finish, or ever get built at all. I had not given this much thought, other than to dismiss the idea totally, until the telephone rang the other evening. It was a 'market researcher' for the Beeb. We exchanged pleasantries, and he then asked me if I would mind spending some 15 minutes answering questions about television, my viewing of it, and my thoughts etc. "Oh joy" I thought "a victim!"

I explained that this 'survey' would not take his estimated 15 minutes, as my views were short, if somewhat unorthodox. He said that it was OK, and started to ask a series of dumb questions: Did I have cable? – No: Did I have satellite? – No: Did I have Freeview? – No. It went on like this for a couple of minutes and then he became flustered, as I did not seem to fit the 'norm'. He reverted to the basic questions about what channels I watched and how often. Even this did not seem to satisfy him, as he could not seem to understand that not everybody watches Eastenders or Constipation Street, or that the idea of spending several hours watching people in a house is not what most normal people would call 'entertainment'.

He seemed to give up then and asked what I did watch. I said the odd news programme and sometimes the odd 'true-life' crime programme, all in all, less than 10 hours a week. He went quiet for a bit and then reverted back to the 'digital' questions, the first one being: "Had I thought about going digital?"

It was now my turn, so he got both barrels.

I explained that, in my opinion, the Government were only pushing digital in order to sell off frequency spectrum (the phrase 'frequency spectrum' confused him) to make money. In doing this, the Government were not planning to give Radio Amateurs frequencies that we could use (the term 'Radio Amateurs' also confused him). I then laid into the whole question of funding these digital channels by 'dumbing down' the usual five channels in order to divert millions of pounds to a system that no one seems to want, or even to watch. (I gather there are some digital channels that have less than 5,000 viewers a day.) I asked why these so-called 'new' channels were full of old repeats, not just old repeats but even programmes that were on a different digital channel the night before. He could not answer this (surprise, surprise). I then quoted him some of the TV listings for that day. I said that there is 'ITV4, E4, More 4, and BBC4', my question therefore is "What for?" - "There are 36 different digital programmes listed in my paper, most are repeats of things that have been on the 'normal' channels, some of these are repeated twice, if not three times a day, some channels only start transmitting at 6.00pm and finish around 10.30 and seem to only to consist of repeats of one particular programme."

I asked him why anyone would want to buy into the idea of switching over to digital to watch repeats on a system where you have to have at least one volt of signal to show a decent picture? I said that really I blamed the Welsh. If that stupid village had decided that they didn't like all those digital channels when they were forced to try them all out a couple of years ago, we would not be in this position now.

I then asked him another question he could not answer – "Why would anyone want to turn on their television, to listen to the radio?"

This really stumped him as there was silence at the end of the 'phone, and, after what seemed an age, he politely said that none of my views were covered by the form he was filling in, or the 'tick-boxes' it supplied.

So we called it quits and said our farewells and he went away confused and probably thinking that I was some form of nutter. In a way he is right. Why should I conform, just because the government says I have to? In a few years, they will switch off the 'normal' TV. Great! - It will save me a licence fee, estimated then to be well over 200 sobs a year.

It just so happened that I had a conversation with my next-door neighbour a day or so later. He asked about digital TV and the like, and so I advised him to go on cable, my reasoning being that then I would not cause him TVI, 'cos without any TV to watch, and condx picking up over the next couple of years, I will be spending more time on the bands!

The Old Codger (son of G9BF)