Ruh Roh...
Leashing the Wireless Mutt

How to Manage and Train America's
New Mixed-Breed Litter of Wireless Puppies

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Wireless Mutt:

1. A piece of hardware or software that incorporates multiple technical disciplines i.e. cellular, IT, wi-fi, wi-max, VoIP.

2. One of many words from the Shonik'tionary that will become standard in the emerging Wireless Resource Management industry

Overview:

It's time to call the wireless humane society! An overpopulation of wireless mutts is quickly approaching and soon the number of wireless mutts will far outnumber the people certified and properly trained to support them. Over the next 5 years as everything starts moving to a wireless platform, should we be concerned that these wireless mutts will run wild and rabid?

Certified Wireless Mutt Specialist and Master Trainer, Ms. Shonika Proctor, says YES! We should all be concerned, *very concerned*. Quote, "...in 2003 when Research in Motion introduced the BlackBerry with Integrated Cellular Phone and Calypso Wireless introduced the first phone that roamed seamlessly between a cellular and Wi-Fi network, is when our helpdesks and support personnel needed to be 'cross-pollinating' as well. Instead the carriers, manufacturers and content providers independently contained all of those support entities and to date have primarily focused on a sales centric model. Today wireless mutts are becoming the standard, not the exception. That now puts our training and support personnel nearly 4 years behind the curve. And to make things more confusing, the problem no longer solely lies with the wireless industry, but with multiple technical industries that have been cross breeding with wireless as well. If these industries do not address this problem soon, it could potentially become a crisis."

If end users are not able to get on-going support for these new products and services, they are unable to determine whether or not they are truly a benefit or Return On their Investment. Ultimately, they may be less inclined to buy them. On the flip side the developers of these products could develop 'smarter phones' that require less technically savvy users, of course at a cost to the end user, but a bigger question is how will they sustain their businesses in this extremely competitive and constantly growing industry until that point? We need all of our players in wireless to stay in the game because their expertise in their respective fields will be extremely invaluable to everyone in this emerging industry as we begin to build solutions inclusive and not irrespective of the end user. Read on to gain supporting background information and build your own theories on how we can get out of the 'dog house'....Bow wow wow yippy yo, yippy yay

Ruh Roh...Leashing the Wireless Mutt:
How to Manage and Train America's New Mixed-Breed Litter of Wireless Puppies

All puppies (ok most) are cute and sweet...until they grow up ; -) Don't get me wrong, dogs are great they look after your house while you're at work, give your kids someone else to annoy while you're busy, and provide a great excuse for getting out of the house (and obligations you'd rather avoid) because they need almost continual low level maintenance. At least if you get a purebred dog, you know what you're in for from the start. Their bloodlines tell you virtually everything you'll ever need to know from how well you can expect the dog to hunt, to whether or not it'll be any good at putting up with your nephew pulling its ears for hours on end. If you've got a mixed-breed mutt, on the other hand, your journey down the dog ownership road isn't always so smooth. Sure, the Labrador side of the dog is great with that ear-pulling nephew. As for the Staffordshire Terrier side, well, let's just hope you never have to find out...

Got a phone? Don't we all? Is it one of those flashy new phones that does loads of tricks? Perhaps the real question should be, how many gadgets fall out when you drop your handbag or take off your jacket? MP3 player, wireless broadband card, work phone, personal phone, camera...the list, for some of us, goes on. But, thanks to a number of people doing exceptionally clever things with silicon these days, it doesn't have to. The trouble is, the more technology those clever boffins can cram into a single device, the less help they seem inclined to give anyone who tries to use the things. So what you end up with in the end is a really shiny, stylish piece of techno-bling that does a lot of tricks, but not necessarily for you.

You see, gadgets and dogs they're not so different. You have to do your research before you buy either. You have to give both plenty of attention. You're obligated to learn more and more about them as you go, and do a shed load of ongoing routine maintenance to keep them on their best form. The similarities run deep and figuring out how to tame either beast can be a nightmare if you don't know where to turn. For those with a purebred puppy problem, turning to the local AKC parent organization for the breed is an invaluable resource but for the rest of us, the dog community isn't so quick to respond. Instead of getting helpful responses from fellow pet owners with dogs of a similar breeding, you're more likely to get a deluge of unhelpful responses.

The same seems to hold true for our supposedly invaluable wireless devices. If you suddenly can't check your email on your phone, the email people blame the phone people. The phone people, unsurprisingly, blame the email people. That leaves you stuck in the middle with no answers. More importantly, you're left without the email you bought that phone to keep an eye on in the first place. And this is a situation that only seems to get worse with the addition of other services and tricks to your wireless mutt.

Proven Bloodlines
Choosing a purebred dog is one thing, but finding a wireless device that has an extensive history of fans, reliability and support as standard is a completely different endeavor.

For most people, the first generation hybrid wireless device was the BlackBerry. Truth be told, electronics firms the world over were developing devices similar to the BlackBerry for a few years before the clever bods at Research in Motion made the first BlackBerry devices publicly available in 1999. The device was, for some, a huge help allowing access to email on the move. As features were added to the handheld over time, business people and tech-heads alike were pleased to see a myriad of uses for this one simple tool. At its inception, the BlackBerry was largely supported by your company's in-house IT guru, kind of like having a live-in dog sitter.

After all, the point of the device was simple   keeping you in touch with the office while you were off at a conference, out on a sales call or whatever. Fast-forward to today, where the BlackBerry and other handheld devices are still often supported by IT Helpdesks, but organizations are starting to realize that IT and Wireless, although both technical in scope are two completely disciplines requiring two different kinds of individuals to support them.

In a similar vein, our landlines aren't what they used to be. Qwest, Verizon and a number of the nation's leading providers of 'traditional' phone services are branching out to offer combinations of new and old technology. You can bundle your landline with broadband, satellite TV and even a roaming wireless broadband card   meaning even your home phone isn't as simple as it used to be. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone service providers such as Vonage and Skype are making the world a lot more intimate for a lot less cheaper than their traditional landline counterparts. Sure there are savings to be made by combining services and changing to these new providers, and the implication is that you can save even more in the long run by investing a little more in the devices and software that handle all your telecommunications needs. But is that really the case? It's difficult for many to understand the fiscal benefits of investing in emerging technology when there's little on offer to support it.

The addition of these emerging technologies combined into one wireless device is now making it even more difficult for the average in-house IT team, let alone individual user to keep up.   For the average in house IT department providing ongoing training and support for the end users that are often no longer based in the office gets a little more challenging with the introduction of each new handheld along with the many new technologies and features that come on the upgraded model and little or no supporting documentation on the device.

The Hybrid Catastrophe

Today's wireless hybrid is definitely more of a mutt than an AKC show champion. When you need help for the device, you can turn yourself inside out asking the phone people, the IT people, the email people, the VOIP people, the satellite people, the MP3 people...everyone on earth for help. And at the end of the line, you'll be all bent out of shape with very few answers and in many cases more frustrated than when you started. You need a hybrid support resource to go with your hybrid wireless device. But where can you turn to find one?

No one seems to have the answer to that question   but you can bet if you stick your nose around the door of a Cingular, Sprint, T-Mobile, Verizon or other non-affiliate wireless shop, they'll have at least ten more devices on offer that will add to your mobile device dilemma. Whether you're an individual looking at the most efficient way to manage your own freelance empire or a corporation trying to find an effective means of keeping your staff in the loop wherever their jobs take them, choosing the right wireless devices is a difficult task. The semi-good news is, the ever-expanding internet is crawling with user groups, support forums and expertise addressing virtually every concern anyone has ever had about, well, just about anything.

Need to know what kind of pet food is best for protecting the sensitive joints of your favorite Retriever? Ask Google. Similarly, if you need advice on where to find good cheap food for your all-round family pet, Google knows. And this, too, is where the wireless mutt can be leashed   through the pooling of both questions and answers. However, when you're spending a fair amount of money on a device you or your staff will rely on to do their jobs and meet the needs of your customers, the 'just Google it' method isn't always best or most reassuring.

You want the latest technology. You need access to training in how to apply that technology to your day-to-day tasks, and that means more than just reading the manual. Perhaps most important of all, you need access to a

well-informed support stream that can do a little more for you than tap questions into Google. After all, the odds are good you can do that on your hybrid in the first place. So the question becomes: where do I go to support this device that does everything?

Leashing the Wireless Mutt

Any good trainer will tell you that it doesn't matter a bit what sort of dog you've got if you show the animal you're the boss, you shouldn't have any trouble. Similarly, a solid wireless provider will be able to offer you a variety of phones, each designed with the manufacturer's own expertise at its core. But as anyone who has a device with more than one of these features inevitably learns, odds are the device will do a couple things well, and a couple things really poorly. It's often said that only a shoddy workman blames his tools and to an extent, when it comes to the hybrid wireless device, this is true. The user pool lacks experience, the devices lack support and can often seem counter-intuitive to even the sharpest of users. In a sense, we're all shoddy wireless workmen. We've got these amazing contraptions that are supposed to set us free but we end up limited by an inability to fully utlize the potential locked in the slimline titanium cases.

The solution is a wider pool of support resources and though the online support communities for popular devices are growing by leaps and bounds, it's corporations slinging millions of dollars into this industry and it's high time they started helping the rest of us make the most of our investment in these magic little tools. After all, the point of the hybrid wireless device is that it'll streamline everything, lighten the load in our handbags or pockets and ultimately liberate us from the shackles of our workplace without costing our employers anything in terms of productivity. When you combine the staggering amount of capital being plowed into wireless technology of all sorts with our increasing dependence on the variety of devices on offer it's easy to see the trouble we could be heading for without a little forethought.

A Hit Dog Gon' Holla

Anyone who has ever owned a wireless device, much like a new puppy, realizes that it can be as frustrating as it is fascinating. For many, finding a solution means doing hours of research - and a little good old trial and error experimentation which often results in an extensive amount of resources exhausted. For others, the faster route to succeeding in leashing the wireless mutt is consulting an expert, or a group of experts. However, managing your wireless services should never be a burden, nor should it be a bottomless pit that continually sucks away at your IT, telecom and consulting budgets.

As mentioned previously, finding that Jack (or Jill) -of-all-trades expert isn't as easy as it could be. You'll need to find someone who's been through the trials, tribulations and growing pains of wireless through its leaps and bounds in the last decade. Someone who, like a dog trainer, can spend a little time with your troublesome mutt and make insightful recommendations. It's those recommendations that will help you harness the power of your wireless services and devices and tap in to their full potential.

Managing the New Mixed Breed Litter of Wireless Puppies

Support levels need to be provided at the manufacturer and carrier level. At this time of tremendous industry growth, both have a challenging time continually training their sales representatives who are constantly promoting and pushing these new devices. This is where effective independent training and support-centric organizations can pick up the slack. We are starting to see this service style concept slowly emerge

on the consumer side with the introduction of sales-support centers i.e. the Best Buy-Carphone Warehouse Joint Venture. But there is still much to be done to take care of our public and private sector accounts. When customer care and helpdesk personnel are properly certified and trained on the capabilities of the many wireless devices they can be an invaluable resource to both the individual and corporate user struggling to adapt to the new challenges of dealing with a new technology. Essentially, technology, even emerging technology, should be an exciting tool that enhances your overall productivity and experience. Because in the end, every dog should have its day!

Shonika Proctor is the New 'IT' Girl. She is evangelizing and revolutionizing the next generation of customer care and helpdesk support which will fully support wireless hybrid devices and services or what she often refers to as 'wireless mutts'. Shonika is an industry thought leader and a pioneer of the emerging wireless resource management industry. Her company, Group Interactive, Inc, helps techno-phobic and overwhelmed account administrators to centralize and more efficiently manage all of their wireless resources and assets: paper, products and people. Shonika's forward thinking, edgy and innovative problem solving skills serves as the justification and reasoning for why she has *never* followed the wireless industry…it's because she leads it!

So What Do You Think….Are we headed for a Wireless Helpdesk Crisis?

Sound off and share your thoughts on this topic by sending an email to ltwm@groupinteractive.net

Upon receipt of your email you will automatically be sent a brief survey and a space will be included to leave your feedback, questions, testimonials and/or comments pro or against.