

Economist & Sun/Sun-Tribune

DIVERSIONS

Oh, the tangled tech web we weave

Gadgets don't always make our lives easier

BY JEROME WATT
Staff Writer

Technology, it's supposed to make our lives easier, but that's not always the case.

As often as not, those high-tech gadgets you just had to have end up in the back of a closet or tucked under the stairs, collecting dust, never to be used again, because they did not deliver on advertised promises.

Tony Pamment, known as the "computer guy" in his Royal LePage realty office in Richmond Hill, has seen his fair share of technology hang-ups.

Mr. Pamment is a trainer at the Toronto Board of Realtors and helps real estate agents learn new technologies. He has trained people on new technology for the past 12 years.

"That's why I've got white hair," he joked.

In his business, technology is essential and can make things run much more efficiently.

"It allows an agent to maintain contact if nothing else," he said. "The biggest problem is getting a hold of an agent and that's half the battle."

But technology needs to be approached cautiously, he said.

A palm held/cell phone device looks like a winner, but if the cell phone portion goes down, you lose both devices when it gets repaired, Mr. Pamment said.

"It's a wonderful concept," he said. "But if one piece of that device goes wrong, both parts are effectively unavailable to you."

There comes a point where this all-in-one thing is not practical.

"All-in-one devices may perform several functions, he said, but usually end up performing all those functions worse than a device solely devoted to a task.

In another case, Mr. Pamment could make use of his cell phone and laptop computer to keep connected with the Internet, but the cord to hook his cell phone with his computer is too expensive.

Same situation with mail-

merging programs that make mass mailings easier, Mr. Pamment said. While printing letters is easy with the program, getting a printer to print the envelopes is difficult.

"Most printers you have to feed (the envelopes) one at a time unless you buy an envelope feeder," he said. "If the printer is \$1,000, the envelope feeder is \$900."

Most people end up printing their envelopes on an old-fashioned typewriter, he said.

Often, Mr. Pamment said, the thicker and more complicated the

manual, the less likely people are to use the device.

The Nintendo Game Cube sold like hotcakes when it came out a little over two years ago, said Linda Balboul, manager at Gamers World in Thornhill, but now the trend has dropped off.

She said the Game Cube was quickly eclipsed by video game systems, such as the Sony PlayStation 2, that have a DVD player.

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Evelyn Wolf

Dirty Knees

Fallen leaves nature's gift to gardeners

Q. I'd like to start using all the leaves we have in our yard at this time of year in my garden, but I've been told they can rot and create a big mess. Can I use them directly on my garden beds?

A. That's absolute gold falling from your trees. Gardener's gold. Yes, you can and should use your fallen leaves in your garden for many reasons. All you need to do to prevent rot problems is chop them up a bit to increase air flow.

The fallen leaves of deciduous trees are a major part of nature's intricate, self-sustaining system. Through this annual cycle of shedding, rest and renewal, soil is given an annual boost of organic matter to keep it alive and able to feed and sustain plant life. Somehow though, we have come to think of autumn leaves as garden "waste" that needs to be cleaned away.

Let's look more closely at this annual gardening ritual.

Each autumn, we put out \$25 or more to buy extra large bags to cope with the task of bagging leaves. Special gadgets to help keep the bags open while you rake and stuff can also be bought for a few more dollars. We then haul dozens of these full bags to sit at the curb for a couple of weeks, a real eyesore, until yard waste pickup day.

On this day, your tax dollars go toward paying someone around \$2 per bag to pick up this "waste." They then

See USE, page 26.



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PUBLIC NOTICE - MARKHAM CENTRE

On July 8, 2003, the following Council Members went on record voting Yes to the Approval Draft Plan of a Subdivision for Markham Centre. Let's hold Council members: D. Cousens, F. Scarpitti, T. Wong, S. Daurio, J. Virgilio, J. Heath, K. Usman, D. Horchik and A. Chiu accountable for the projected 3540 new residential units.
Council moved by J. Virgilio affirms Hydro for profit 2002/03 profit \$4 million & pooled with property taxes.

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