(Approx. 617 words)

Unfriendly Technology

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I suppose overall the advance in technology has given all the world many wonderful benefits. Instant email, global positioning systems, voice recognition, practically free storage of photos and documents, internet access to everything in seconds, and much more. But along with technology, some things are, may I say, not very user-friendly. The problem, I think, is that the people designing things do not ask us, seniors, how we like what they designed or how we would use it. So here are a few of my “Why did they do it THAT way??” rants, and maybe they are yours too.

Buttons and switches -- Whether on your laptop, DVD player, or other devices, why do they make them so small and hard to find? Why color the buttons the same color as the panel? They should be large enough to see easily, press with your fingertip (not a pen point), and clearly labeled with print big enough to read.

Too many options – One simple example of this is setting an alarm on your smartphone. Will the alarm sound if your phone is on “silent” mode? Do you want it to vibrate too? What alarm tone or music do you want? Will it be loud enough? Do you want it to repeat? How often? Etc. It could take a long time to set all the options and parameters just for a simple alarm tone! It seems all apps keep adding on more options, but are they more confusing than helpful?

Company phone answering systems – Did you ever hear: “Your call is important to us, to help us serve you better, please listen and select from the following 19 options…”! Never mind that the reason you are calling has nothing to do with the options they give you. Now try to guess how to reach a real person. Do you press “O”? In the old days, dialing “O” always got you right to a real person. And if you do get to talk to someone, what country do you think they are in?

Too many accounts and passwords – Every company and every app you use wants you to set up an “account,” – which means another account and password to remember. I hope you have all these written down somewhere! Getting a prescription? Paying your electric bill? Shopping at your local grocery store? Did you purchase a new tool or appliance? They ALL want you to have an account and password with them. And why not? They need to send you notices and ads and sell your email address to other companies so they can get an account with you too.

Ads with “timer countdowns” and no “X”s -- Ok, I guess getting ads is a given these days on everything from games to company websites. But many do not show you a “countdown” timer for the ad, so you have no idea when you can exit it and get back to your game. Even if there is a countdown timer, where is that “X” to exit when the time is up? They still delay it or make it appear elsewhere, so you have to hunt and look for it. Sometimes they hide the “X” so you can’t find it. It’s a game we all have to learn to play and, to keep you from getting bored, they keep changing the rules.

I could go on with many more, but what are your complaints? I am still looking for a job ad like this: “Seniors wanted to test our software, apps, and products. So, we need your expert advice to make our service senior-friendly!”