

WORDS OVER THE COPPER WIRE

By John F. Hall

AT&T has publicly stated that it wants to get rid of the analog phone lines in Kentucky and the other states that it “serves.” And I use the word “serves” rather loosely. AT&T is



in the business to make a profit. It cost money to maintain telephone poles or pay rent to the electric company to string phone lines on their poles. The telephone line to my house is buried underground, except when it comes out of the ground, to a junction box, and then up their utility pole and overheard to my house. AT&T paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars to lobby the Kentucky legislature for a regulation. Today, if a residential phone line is deactivated for 30 days, that phone line can be abandoned by AT&T, and can never be re-activated.

AT&T boasts that fiber-optic technology will make the analog phone line obsolete, a thing of the past. What they don't tell the public is that fiber-optic wires cannot support fax machines. I have and I use my fax machine, I have two phone lines going to my house. The reason was due to the number of emails that I received when I was in the Army Reserves. I had dial-up email service because, at one time, AT&T could not extend DSL service to my house. They claimed that they had reached maximum capacity. They had to extend their DSL service five years ago, to my great nephew, who built his house 1/10th of a mile down from my house on Dyers Hill road, because his wife is totally deaf. I had HughesNet satellite-internet until a few years ago when AT&T extended DSL to my house.

The fiber-optic lines, at this time in history, have a technical problem. Millions of small, rural businesses use credit card machines. If they don't keep their humble, analog phone line, they will have to give up their credit card machines. These machines cannot operate on the lightning fast fiber-optic lines. Of course, they can take two steps backwards and dust off their old paper-swipe device to obtain the credit card information. But that creates the issue of prior approval of the credit transaction, and that requires a phone call. Some of the newer credit cards do not have raised numbers, like my MasterCard. It has a chip along with the strip on the back of the card. The numbers and card name can be written on the credit card receipt, but that would be taking three steps backwards.

There is more to this story than just words coming over a copper phone line. AT&T wants more than just profit. It wants power to control the satellite television service that I use. I have Dish TV. AT&T purchased Direct TV. They want me to switch.

Every week, like clock work, AT&T sends me a \$300 or \$400 cash offer, if I would drop my home phone line and drop Dish TV. That would allow them to bundle the service into their SDL line. It would seem to be a reasonable thing to do since I pay AT&T for their internet service and for their home phone line. As I was writing this story, a lightning storm came up. Apparently, lightning hitting nearby caused a spike or electrical surge in the ground. The static electricity tripped or burned out a relay in the telephone junction box on my house. I lost the SDL connection that allows me to have AT&T internet. I was

without internet for two days. Joe, the AT&T repairman, came out and fixed the problem in about 20 minutes, at no charge to me. I asked him some questions about fiber-optics, but his answers are another story.

Meanwhile, 30 miles down the road, in the Bradford Square Mall in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, a company set up shop. The name of the company is Direct2Market Innovative Sales Solutions. When ever I see the word “solutions,” I get the feeling that someone is going to get harassed or ripped off. This telemarketer company rented space in the Mall to target perspective customers and, perhaps, to provide customer assistance to existing businesses.

Every morning and every evening, I would receive unwanted calls to my phone. At first, I purchased an answering machine to screen these calls. I pay for caller ID. The calls are flashed across the top of my flat screen TV. Then began the relentless calls from the scammers. I admit that I get amused when I listen to the messages that are left on my answering machine. One scammer left this message: “This is Lieutenant Butler from the Social Security Administration. If you don’t immediately return my call, your Social Security number will be canceled.” From impostors claiming to be from the IRS to credit card administrators, their goal is to deceive for fraudulent gain. One scammer left a message that there was “suspicious” activity on my Medicare account. Since Medicare stopped using Social Security numbers on their cards, the scammers ask the unaware to confirm their card numbers. Sadly, they put fear in the minds of elderly people that barely survive on a fixed income.

I was looking at an advertising booklet from an expensive electronics company. I spotted a device that was fairly new. It is called a Call Blocker and it sells for \$99. That seemed like a lot of money for a small device that claimed to be able to block international, out of area, and private calls. I pondered getting it. I’ve purchased gadgets in the past that turned out to be useless. The Call Blocker device received one of the Queen of England’s Award For Enterprise at the UK International Trade Awards in 2018. So I ordered the device. I must say that the Call Blocker works better than I expected. The device has a large red button. I set up the device, and as advertise, I began to block the scammer and telemarketers calls. When a call comes in, I check the caller ID that comes across my television screen. Then I merely push the red button. Instantly, the call is permanently blocked. In most of my stories I use two types of songs. The first song that I selected is an oldie but a goodie song written by Paul Simon. It is called “The Sound of Silence.” The more calls that I block, the more that I appreciate the sound of silence.

These are Paul Simon’s lyrics: “Hello darkness, my old friend, I’ve come to talk with you again. Because a vision softly creeping left its seeds while I was sleeping. And the vision that was planted in my brain still remains, within the sounds of silence. In restless dreams, I walked alone narrow streets of cobblestone ‘neath the halo of a street lamp. I turned my collar to the cold and damp, when my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light, that split the night and touched the sound of silence. And in the naked light, I saw ten thousand people, maybe more. People talking without speaking. People hearing without listening. People writing songs that voices that never share. And no one dared

disturbed the sounds of silence. ‘Fools,’ said I, ‘You do not know science like a cancer grows. Hear my words that I might teach you. Take my arms that I might reach you.’ But my words, like silent raindrops fell and echoed in the wells of silence. And the people bowed and prayed to the neon god they made. And the sign said, ‘The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls.’ And whispered in the sounds of silence.”

The hymn I selected enhances the theme of my story. Witness Lee wrote the hymn, “My Soul, Be Silent, Wait Upon The Lord.” These are his lyrics: “My soul, be silent, wait upon the Lord! First let Him speak to thee, then speak to Him. True prayer in thee the Lord initiates; thou but a channel art expressing Him. My soul, be silent, wait upon the Lord! Learn to deny thy thought and all thy will. Learn to let God anoint thee with Himself and thru thy prayer His purposes fulfill. My soul, be silent, wait upon the Lord. Silent to all thy wishes and all thy plans, silent to all thy earthly cares and calls, that God may work in thee all His demands. My soul, be silent, wait upon the Lord! Yield to the Spirit all thy heart and mind; here let the Spirit show what God reveals, thee its obedient servant thus to find.”

The Call Blocker allows me to be proactive and lets me silence the scammers that are sending annoying words over my copper phone line.

John F. Hall

Read more stories by John F. Hall and others at:
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