

The Old Vs. The New

Over the past 3 or 4 years I have been writing a variety of training materials dealing with ARES/RACES and addressing issues in Amateur Radio.

The number one problem facing the Amateur radio service is a hostile attitude towards anything that is different, including newcomers and change, meaning improvements in procedures, processes and technology.

So, we are faced with fixing our attitude towards newcomers and change and getting serious about promoting our great hobby. We need to be working on change, our procedures, and our requirements and especially making our services better, every day. Many of our traditional activities rarely meet the contemporary needs of today's public. We have it within our power to make ham radio the 21st century hobby. I truly believe that a high tech hobby, that serves the public's needs and interests, which has the ability to innovate in a multitude of ways by combining the hot topics of wireless communications, computing and network communications ought to thrive in 2008. We have all the pieces sitting right before us if only we would be

willing, through acceptance of change, and to seize the opportunity.

DIGITAL! Most of the world is going digital..! What about HAM radio??????

This is not meant to undervalue the great and dedicated contributions of all those Amateur volunteers that have and do work so hard at public service, but it just struck me that in times past, and recently, I have heard folks passing traffic and they were reading and spelling what seemed like most of the words in a backlog of text messages. In what seemed to be about 30 minutes they passed about the same amount of traffic a Packet or Winlink 2000 system could do in about 2 minutes or less.

So, I found myself wondering why, in the year 2008, our Amateur radio response to the loss of the public and cell telephone and the internet service in an emergency, is for us to revert back to the 1900's use of voice for reading messages over a radio when today, with a simple easy to install and use TNC is 100% fully capable of sending messages 100 to 1000 times faster and ERROR FREE! Our served agencies need this service in today's world!!!!

YES Packet and Winlink 2000 is alive and well in many areas and being used with a great deal of

success. But in MANY other areas it is not and I am only talking about those places. At first I had the impression that Packet and Winlink had never really worked in many statewide networks. I think in part, they tried to make it into a superhammerdyne network that was just gaining momentum when the internet killed packet radio BACK IN THE NINETIES. The internet became easier to use so it gained momentum very quickly and the old packet systems went by the way side because in those days it only worked when the right guru's were on each end and spent their time just configuring things. When asked how they use it, besides shrugs, you got the impression, it didn't work, or no one knew how to use it, or the network was never finished, or more excuses came about for its failures. With today's technologies you do not need to be a guru to operate these systems, they are almost plug and play!!

So, what's my point? Well, in today's fast moving world where our served agencies, and even all of us, depend on the internet, why cannot most Ham's hook up a TNC to a PC and use it to TALK by using their keyboard or to send messages to someone else? I think maybe the answer to that is because it was made too hard to use in the beginning and then there are those that just refuse to change their olden days mind sets. Today it is not hard to use, it isn't that

expensive, and there are simple training programs on the internet. If you have a computer and know how to use Outlook Express you can use Packet and Winlink!!!!

There is SO MUCH we can do with a radio and a digital link, and it is something our served agencies would like to have and need. They depend on the use of e-mail and we can give it to them even if the internet is down for local and or long distant use. When the bands are bad for voice communications, digital still makes the trip. Why then do we totally ignore the use of digital communications in all of our emergency response drills? Yes, we still need voice training. But we should not drop back to voice for passing all of the written message traffic until ALL ELSE FAILS. The use of digital communications frees up air time that is a very precious item during emergencies and or disasters. Long technical messages from Emergency Management offices and hospitals can be sent error free in only a matter of a few short minutes.

The BOTTOM LINE IS THIS. WE NOW HAVE DIGITAL HT's that can send digital messages over the internet, we have MOBILE DIGIPEATERS that relay messages for both local and long distant stations, WE HAVE MOBILE TELPAC NODE

STATIONS for relaying messages from the field,
WE HAVE GPS, we have APRS and we have digital
satellites along with Winlink, Airmail, Telpac,
Paclink and we have PC's EVERYWHERE.

HOW can we encourage our response teams and
members to use them effectively and to train to use
them just like they spend so much time training for
voice operations?

There is no excuse for most hams to not having the
where-with-all to hook up a TNC to the serial port of
a PC and being able to establish a digital link to
handle message traffic. It could even be used for their
personal communications use when the internet is
down. Wouldn't it be nice to have a system to use of
your daily messages?

Just like we standardize on the NTS or ARRL
Radiogram format for passing message traffic, we
need to assure that operators can do a minimum
digital communications link.

*EVERYTHING IS GOING DIGITAL!.... What about ham
radio???*