

## More repair companies in 2002 buck overall trend of decline in numbers

The number of U.S. appliance repair companies has increased for the first time since 1994.

Ron Sawyer, executive director of the Professional Service Association,

reports an increase of 23 new companies for the year 2002, but the industry's overall trend has shown a decline from 10,546 companies in 1992 to 12,647 in 2002.

It's a scary feeling if you happen to own a repair business or work in the repair industry. Even in worse shape is the electronics repair industry, which showed a staggering decline of companies from 20,014 in 1992 to 8,986 in 2002.

HIGHER COSTS

Many of us in this industry may argue that there were too many repair facilities to begin with.

Others might say this situation led to some companies acting like a bunch of crooks.

But the fact of the matter is that these large declines are due to the easy disposal of products.

The availability of a cheap appliance makes it easier to replace a failed product, which then leads to less service.

We will see a big change in the next few years as televisions are now costing thousands of dollars and new state-of-the-art appliances with

Internet capacity will try to capture the market. Spend a lot to purchase these items, and you'll spend to fix them, too.

An article in the Wall Street Journal on April 3 suggested that General Electric is getting ready to diversify its major appliance division.

John Waterman, chief investment officer of Rittenhouse Asset Management, pointed out that GE has been a great growth stock for years with a price has more than tripled in recent years. It outpaced most other large companies through its concentration on growth industries, and today's lost ground is being recognized by those who invest in the company as part of a growth portfolio. In a recent presentation by GE Chairman Jeffrey Immelt, appliances were never even mentioned as part of the company's future strategy.

For us old-timers in the business who in years past would always recommend their products, this information causes us to stop and think.

On a personal level, I'm seeing too much of our money going overseas.

There is so much to do around here to make life better for many of the unfortunate.

### A NEW INSTALLATION

The dishwasher installed in millions of homes usually has a couple of screws holding the top of it to the underside of the kitchen counter.

With the installation of granite and the like being used in increasing numbers as counter tops, how can you drive a couple of cheap screws into the material?

That is almost impossible, the installer says, so the manufacturers are coming out with a new system to make sure the dishwasher doesn't fall over when your child inadvertently steps on the open door. You probably will be baffled when you are pulling out the dishwasher for any service or replacement.

What is new are the holes on each bottom railing where the installer is required to bolt it to the floor. Remember to remove these bolts or you could cause a lot of damage, to your back.

### A PERSONAL NOTE

This month marks the retirement of my wife, Valerie, in the field of education. After 32 years, she is leaving her principal's job at Gallimore Elementary in Canton in the Plymouth Canton Community School District.

Through Valerie, I have met hundreds of residents who read this column. I want to thank all of you for the kind words you always shower me with.

I can assure you that, with Valerie, your children always came first and that from now on, I'm the guy.

Thank you for being such great parents and I hope you will support the new principal you have. Trust me, she will miss you, the teachers and mostly the children but once I show her how to catch fish, it's another world.

Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon is host of Ask The Handyman on Infinity Radio AM 1270 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays and Sundays. You can hear his tips on WJL 950 on weekdays. You can call him on his show at (248) 356-1270.

## Say good-bye to junk e-mail

Junk e-mail - a.k.a. spam - has been called an epidemic, and with good reason: it clogs e-mailboxes like so much arterial plaque. A friend of mine recently groused that he was experiencing a 75-to-1 spam ratio: he receives 75 junk e-mails for every valid one. I haven't gone so far as to quantify my own spam ratio, but it's ridiculously high. My first order of business every morning is to weed the ads, come-ons, scams, and foreign-language gibberish from my mailbox.

While individual states and even the federal government are considering legislation to ban and/or penalize spammers (the people responsible for junk e-mail), don't expect miracles. Even if anti-spam laws hit the books, there's no easy off-switch to throw.

That said, there are steps you can take right now to reduce, and perhaps even eliminate, the flow of spam to your mailbox. For the last few weeks I've been a happy user of Spam Inspector (www.giantcompa-

ny.com), an e-mail filtering utility that automatically quarantines junk messages. The beauty of the program is that it not only blacklists known spam (including, thankfully, foreign language offenders), but also allows you to build a "whitelist" - a roster of people who are allowed to e-mail you. That reduces the chance of missing valid messages, the one risk of using such a utility.

Better still, you can "bounce" spam back to the sender, thus making it appear your e-mail address is invalid and, hopefully, not worth hitting again. To really hit spammers where they hurt, Spam Inspector lets you report them to their internet service providers. Take that, Viagra peddlers!

The software installs directly into your e-mail program, be it America Online, Outlook, or Outlook Express (I tested it with the latter).

It operates largely in the

background, requiring minimal effort on your part. You can try it free for 15 days before plunking down the \$29.95 registration fee - an annoying but small price to pay for a spam-free life. Other anti-spam utilities can be found at sites like Download.com. While I'm on the subject of junk e-mail, allow me to diffuse a few obnoxious chain letters that regularly land in my inbox.

First, it doesn't matter where you buy or don't buy your gaso-

line - it will have no impact whatsoever on terrorism.

Second, your computer's JDDGMGR.EXE (or whatever) file has not mysteriously contracted a virus - so don't delete it. Doing so can actually harm your PC. Where has common sense gone? Stop the madness!

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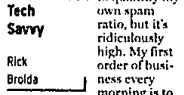
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