

One of the reasons we like living in Ankeny is because it is about half way between Dubuque, where my parents live and Sioux City, where Joanne's parents live. How a geeky guy from Dubuque ended up with a beautiful girl from the other side of the state is a story for another time. The fact that our parents live so far away presents us with some challenges. One of those challenges is that they very rarely get to watch their grandchildren in their activities. An answer is to video those activities and send it to them.

Like many families we carry a video camera to many of our children's activities. Over the years we have grown technologically from the old Super 8 movies to video cameras as big as a picnic basket that you had to carry on your shoulder or risk hospitalization. Now we own a camera that is very small, takes great pictures and sound, and records it all digitally on a computer chip stored in the camera itself. And if I can remember correctly, it cost about the same as that old Super 8. Except we have a problem.

The hard drive is practically full with family memories, and we do not want to erase those older memories just to record new ones. The answer was simple, copy those precious memories from the video recorder to something more permanent. I thought about copying to our family computer, but we also have limited space there and it is old and frail enough that I worry about ever retrieving the data again. The answer came that we should copy those memories to a DVD so that we can watch them again and again.

So we went out and bought a combination VHS/DVD recorder. That way we could also copy some of our old VHS tapes to DVD and really be up with the times. Joanne's sister had a unit that she liked, so based on her recommendation we bought a similar one. I started with a video of a basketball game of a team that I coach for my youngest son Ben. That DVD was going to be a teaching tool so that the boys could see what they were doing right, and what they could improve upon. I was really proud when I put the DVD in the player at another boy's house, it was going to be a great coaching moment. Except the DVD didn't play.

I apparently had forgotten to "finalize the disc". No great coaching was going to happen that night. After I figured out how to finalize the disc I was able to copy several hours worth of memories and clear space off of the camera's hard drive. Until recently, when the hard drive became full again. This time the recorder would shut off suddenly right in the middle of an event. Sometimes 20 minutes in, sometimes 30, and for no reason! I know I was doing everything according to the instructions.

As small business owners and managers we have a responsibility to choose our vendors and equipment carefully and responsibly. We must do adequate research and check recommendations, more than one recommendation. What we cannot afford to do, especially in this economy, is waste precious resources on technology that claims to help, but doesn't work. As sales people we need to make sure to give our clients several references to check out. Not all of them have to be perfect, but all have to be honest.

After getting frustrated with my recorder, I went on line to find out more. Turns out that only 1 in 20 people liked this product, and those had just started to use it. I am now on the hunt for a new DVD recorder. It would be great for the grandparents to their kid's kids more often, if only on video. Any recommendations?

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ankeny*