

BLINK, BLINK, BLINK...

Over the holidays, I enjoyed an all-too-brief respite from what I like to call the tyranny of the blinking red light.

If you own a mobile phone or a smart phone, you know what I mean. No matter how you mute the ringtone or suppress whatever wacky sounds your device makes when you get a new email or text, that %\$#@! blinking red light still appears and demands your attention.

The blinking light is an equal opportunity annoyer. It doesn't care if you've received an important call from the boss or spam from that Nigerian prince... it blinks the same and cries out for you to stop and check.

I tend to keep my phone on "silent" or "vibrate" most of the time, so the blinking red light is a nearly constant companion. It tells me when a friend has called – or a telemarketer or, God forbid, a PR guy with a great story idea about a revolutionary new wind-powered beverage cart that also mows greens and makes killer blended margaritas.

It also tells me when I have new messages in any one of my four email inboxes (all of them flow into the same place on my BlackBerry). I get about 100 emails a day. Most are crap (thank you PGA of America media relations department!) but many



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

are from readers or advertisers and I truly like to be able to respond right away. When I'm traveling or away from my laptop or iPad, I spend mucho time finding my glasses and figuring out how to get my thumbs to connect with those tiny keys.

Last year, I added Facebook to the mix. Now, every time someone posts something on my wall, the tiny red signal is ignited. I use Facebook to keep in touch with more than 800 friends, acquaintances and young, attractive LPGA players (who all seem to be very interested in being friends with middle-aged turf editors).

Yes, there's a lot of junk on Facebook. Pictures of grandkids, posts about how badly someone's college basketball team sucks and various time-wasting games. But, a good chunk of it is serious and useful. I pick up story ideas and trends from Facebook posts made by superintendents in the U.S. and around the

planet. Last year, during the "summer from hell," it was remarkable how you could track the worst of the weather moving eastward. A guy in Kansas City would post, "Greens are fried," and the next day a guy in St. Louis would say the same thing, then Indianapolis and so on until it hit Baltimore.

I added yet more blinks to my phone recently by reinitiating our Twitter feed (@gcmagazine). I resisted Twitter – Lord, I tried – but I finally became convinced it's the best way to keep up on news and to check out the various industry blogs and e-zines that are Tweeted out. I'm now using it to feed out breaking news, retweet interesting stuff from others and send the occasional sneak preview of an article or column out to the 500 or so who follow us to date. During the GIS, we'll use Twitter to send updates, reports and photos out to attendees and those of you at home. If you're going to the show (or not) and you're a Twitter type, make sure to follow us.

I fear that I'll eventually burn out the blinking red light. If that happens, I'd be lost. The blinking red light may be a tyrant that demands my attention, but it's also a beacon to the new world of communications that brings global information – stuff you want and you choose to receive – into your hands nearly instantaneously. In a way, that little red winking eye is telling me, "It's time to learn something new."

Speaking of which, we're delivering something else new besides our Twitter, Facebook and news feeds. We relaunched our e-newsletter earlier this month and renamed it, "Fast & Firm." The goal is to give you news, perspective, analysis and original ideas (not just junk from Google searches) plus video, podcasts and links to the best blogs out there. Look for Fast & Firm every other Monday and our new Video Plus! multimedia e-news and our new product showcase e-news in alternating weeks.

In the meantime, if you simply can't stand that blinking red light, here's a tip: black electrician's tape. Covers the damn thing right up and you can blissfully ignore the outside world if you so choose. It's a wonderful low-tech solution for the tyranny of high-technology. **GCI**

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