

Doesn't everybody?

Some people think that books, magazines and newspapers are dead. Borders, the bookstore chain recently in bankruptcy, is closing down all its stores. If you walk into a Barnes and Noble, the display for the Nook (their e-reader), has taken over the entrance. All around it *seems* that *everybody* is using tablets and e-readers to read books and magazine and that *nobody* is reading the printed on paper stuff anymore. But, that would be wrong.

Did you know that only 12% of U.S. adults own an e-reader (like a Kindle, Nook, etc.)? Or that 35% of U.S. adults own a smart phone (Iphone, Blackberry, etc.)? Given how the media reports things, and if you are surrounded by folks who are early adopters, then you could be excused for thinking the number was much much higher—like 99%.

The truth is that not everybody is on the smart phone/e-reader/all-computer-all-the-time bandwagon. The numbers above mean that nearly two thirds of adults in the US do NOT use a smart phone, and nearly 90% do not have an e-reader. This indicates to me that many many people out there are still consuming media in more “traditional” ways—like in a printed format. Or perhaps are relying on television and radio.

It is a wrong (and dangerous) assumption to think that “everybody is doing it.” They are not. Unless it is breathing, not ever human being out there is doing (or thinking) the same thing as you are.

Last week, I attended a presentation purportedly about YouTube. In effect, it was about stuff you could do if you wanted to get together a video to promote your company (it was not a very in-depth or insightful presentation). One thing that the presenter asked was whether people in the room knew what QR codes are. I turned to a colleague sitting beside me

and asked “who doesn’t?” It turns out that most in the room (all communicators I may add) had no idea. Because I know what a QR code is (a quick response code that has become ubiquitous on print ads everywhere, and which when scanned takes you to a website), and I see them everywhere, I assumed everyone else did too. Clearly, I was wrong.

You can’t assume that everybody knows something. In communications, making assumptions can be detrimental to making your message clear.

And yet, people using the above-mentioned QR codes in their ads are assuming that people know what they are! And also, they are assuming that people have a smart phone that they will use to scan the QR code. But if we go with the fact that 35% of people have a smart phone, and from my unscientific survey, even fewer know what a QR code is, then you are probably reaching somewhere south of 30% of people by using those codes. Think about that.