Could Verizon Hurt Its Enterprise Business With This “IT Guy” Commercial?

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Why must the IT professional be portrayed as an awkward, impatient dork?

It’s doubtful that represents the majority and really, the old paradigm suggesting people who are good with computers can’t also be good with people seems awfully dated. Computing has never been closer to omnipresent than right now, in the midst of the smartphone revolution.

Back in 1999 when Jimmy Fallon played “Nick Burns: Your Company’s Computer Guy” as an obnoxious, know-it-all on “Saturday Night Live,” the stereotype of the IT professional as insufferable weirdo still seemed novel. But now, it’s just lazy.

So it’s surprising for a couple of reasons to see Verizon Wireless trot out the old trope in a new holiday commercial for its tablets.

Video of Verizon: Wayne knows their Tablets | TV Commercial

In the short clip, an office employee appears startled and mildly fearful of a terse, frumpy IT guy who says things like “accessing brain information” while he thinks. It’s insulting on a few levels, not the least of which being that no one with a passing knowledge of technology would automatically assume someone wants to buy a slate from a carrier. A real IT professional would likely lead with something like, “Wi-Fi, LTE or both?” or “Apple or Android?” or “What are you going to use it for?”

But the real reason it’s perplexing to see Verizon go in on IT professionals in its ad is that enterprise business factors well into the carrier’s revenue stream.

In its third quarter wireline highlights, Verizon touted 5.2 percent annual growth in sales of strategic services. The carrier talked up agreements with American Red Cross, General Electric, Guggenheim Partners, JetBlue, Juniper Networks, Landstar Systems, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., Shangri-La Hotels, Synchronoss Technologies and the U.S. Department of the Interior.

All of those partners, to be sure, employ IT professionals. And IT professionals, in a way, are the technology gatekeepers of the enterprise. If one wishes to get in the door, it seems foolish to offend the person holding the key.

It’s extremely likely nothing will come of the commercial. It’s not outlandishly offensive, nor is it particularly funny, so odds are it will just go unnoticed. But on the off chance some company’s IT professional sees that commercial and thinks, “Really?”—then there’s also the possibility they’ll push for their enterprise to take

its business elsewhere.

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