

Stacking, meshing or phubbing? What goes on in your lounge?

The rising use of smartphones and tablets has created a new phenomenon, and even **DICK LUMSDEN** has succumbed.

In olden times, when you could count the TV choices each night on the fingers of one hand, whole families would sit together and marvel at the images being beamed directly into their sitting rooms.

It didn't last of course. And as TVs became cheaper and smaller they started appearing in bedrooms, kitchens and even sheds, breaking up the family gatherings and creating an explosion in TV choice.

But now, it seems, the circle has fully turned and more and more households are slimming down to just one TV.

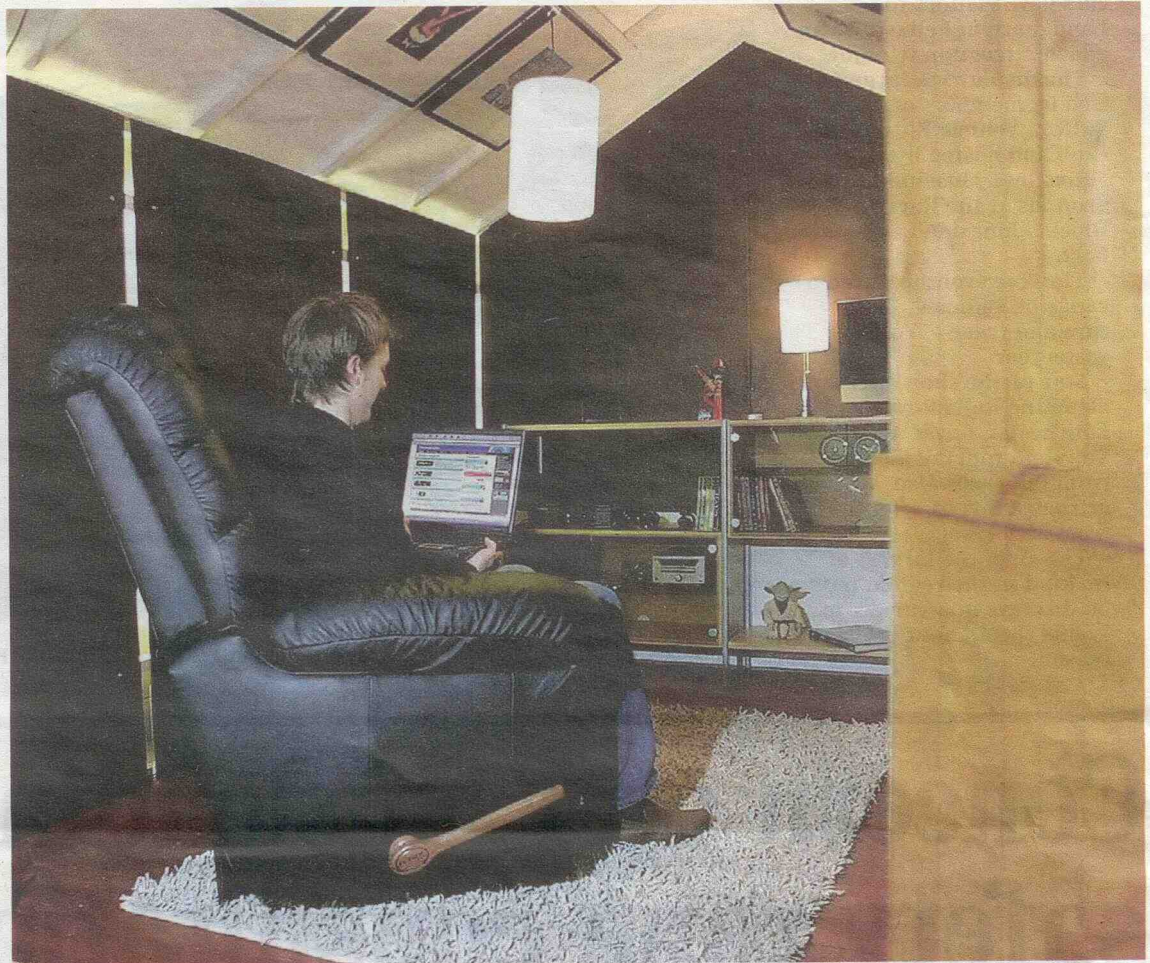
But Ofcom, the communications watchdog which counts these things, says it may not be all good news. In fact, while families may once more be gathering in sitting rooms all over the country, it seems they might as well still be sitting outside in the shed or upstairs in the bedrooms.

You see, we've now entered the era of media meshing, media stacking and phubbing...and if you don't know what they are, then you soon will, because our older folks are the fastest rising culprit group.

Let's start with media stacking. Picture the scene at Lumsden Towers. We're in the lounge with the TV tuned to Eastenders. But I'm only half watching as I am checking emails on my Blackberry, and Mrs Lumsden is multi-tasking - she's on the other side of the room playing solitaire on her iPad and intermittently Googling questions about how old Alfie is, or why Shona McGarty has got so fat! That's called media-stacking.

According to Ofcom, half the adults in the country - that's over 25 million people - now admit to regularly "dual screening" and using some other electronic device to access communications while watching TV.

And then there's media meshing. That's just like stacking only this time you're communicating with someone else about what you are watching on TV. Tweeting "OMG did she really just say that...?" Or texting



■ More of us are multi-tasking by media stacking, meshing or, indeed phubbing these days... not necessarily a bad thing, reckons Dick Lumsden.

Picture: PA

“Even my old Dad at 80 has given up on Pears and has become best friends with Google for his crossword answers

phubbing seems to be a disease mostly confined to the youngsters - but I'm sure we'll succumb sooner or later. Phubbing (phone-snubbing) is when someone plonks themselves on your sofa and immediately pulls out their smartphone and spends the entire evening staring at a four inch screen messaging friends, reading Facebook or tweeting rubbish about how bored they are.

Should we be worried about all of this? Are we turning into a nation of weirdos? I don't think so.

In fact, tablets and smartphones could be the answer to many of our "senior moments". When we forget the name of the actor in

of walking over to the bookshelf and looking up Pears' Cyclopaedia. Even my old Dad at 80 has given up on Pears and has become best friends with Google for his crossword answers.

And here's another thing. It may be a bit of a stretch, but can it just be coincidence that as our grip on personal electronics has increased in the last few years, the amount of people smoking has plummeted? Now, when you walk into a room, instead of reaching for a cigarette for something to do with your hands, you reach into your pocket and pull out your phone to check for messages.

The proportion of people with smartphones has doubled and, according to Public Health England, the number of smokers has dropped by a third over the last decade.

However, there are some people who see mixed blessings in the tsunami of electronic gizmos around the living room - and that's the advertisers.

You see, while putting a mini-computer or a smartphone in someone's hand gives them another chance to reach them

elsewhere.

Again according to Ofcom, the number of hours of TV being watched every day has fallen for children and all adults up to the age of 44. But for adults over 55 there has been a noticeable increase. We now watch closer to six hours of TV a day, compared with just over three hours for someone in their early 20s.

Mind you, I'm not sure how reliable these numbers are for advertisers planning their TV campaigns. If I'm anything to go by, for half of my TV "viewing" time I am usually asleep on the sofa... worn out by all the stacking, meshing, phubbing and wining I did earlier (wining isn't an electronic term by the way, I'm sure you can work it out).

So, if you find yourself stacking or meshing tonight, don't be too worried, you're clearly not alone and it probably won't do you any harm.

■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers. If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to be part