

From the Desk of Bruce Egan

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

June 17, 2002

Mayor, Town of Chapel Hill
Council Members, Town of Chapel Hill
Bill Stockard, Town of Chapel Hill

All,

I am a columnist for the Chapel Hill Herald. I am also the Associate Director for the Information Technology Response Center (the main technical help desk) on the UNC Campus. And I am a Time Warner customer.

I am submitting this letter to begin a dialog regarding the service and support provided to our community by Time Warner for cable TV and RoadRunner ISP service.

Attached are relevant background materials documenting service and support experiences of town residents, two columns I have written regarding my own experience, a letter from Time Warner, and my reply.

My two columns have apparently struck a nerve in our community. People have stopped me on the street to regale me with their own cable stories, which often consist of the same elements as mine – the need for repeated visits, and the inability to reach a supervisor to complain.

As concerned as I am, that it took six visits by Time Warner to resolve my cable problems, I am more concerned about the customer support and feedback aspects of my experience. It is frustrating to repeatedly ask for a supervisor to contact me, to repeatedly ask that my request to talk to a supervisor be documented, and have neither occur, repeatedly.

At UNC I am responsible for a technical staff that provides computer support to faculty, students and staff. Last year we fielded approximately 60,000 service requests. Do we provide every customer with the best service and support possible? We try, but the answer is “No.”

However, when a customer is not satisfied, there is an automatic mechanism in place whereby the customer can easily contact my management team, which is responsible for documenting the situation and getting the issue resolved.

The Town of Chapel Hill has Bill Stockard who was concerned about my cable problems, but Bill can only provide a “reactive” support – in that the customer has to seek him out to begin the

complaint process, and then he is able to react. I should also point out that many community residents don't even know about Bill, or his responsibilities to assist in resolving complaints.

What I would like to have discussed is a "proactive" approach whereby Bill and Time Warner managers are automatically notified of customer dissatisfaction. There are feedback techniques and tools available that are commonplace in today's service/support industry, and would mutually benefit all parties involved.

I encourage the Town of Chapel Hill to begin a dialogue with Time Warner regarding the feasibility of incorporating such techniques into an enhanced service model, whereby customers have easy access to the appropriate level of management for the resolution of ongoing service and support issues.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely



Bruce Egan
Chapel Hill, NC
919/929-1485

"Dead fish go with the flow." -- Anon.

Want to complain about cable? Make an appointment

In my humble opinion, the suits in charge of customer service at the Time Warner Cable Company should be tied up with frayed coax cable, weighted down with obsolete cable boxes and dumped en masse into University Lake for the snapping turtles to feed on.

"But seriously," you ask, "how do you really feel about Time Warner customer service?"



Bruce Egan
Columnist

Let me answer that by relating my cable experience over the last three weeks. You be the judge of whether or not they're holding up their end of the

vendor/customer relationship.

It all began on a Tuesday, April 23. That's when I stayed home, waiting for the cable guy to show up between 8 a.m. and noon to install two new digital boxes. The installer was on time, and had the boxes up and running in a flash. The only problem was that the downstairs TV was having trouble bringing in all the channels, while the upstairs TV was doing fine.

There are two important things to note at this point. One is that on the first visit it was ascertained that the cable on one TV was working, and on the other was not, possibly suggesting a variation in signal going to each cable box. The second item to note is "service compartmentalization," which means that apparently each service team member has one job to do. In this case the installer was responsible for installing the boxes. That's it. Something else wrong? Set up another appointment.

Now that I review this saga, I'm starting to think that death by snapping turtle is too good for those Time Warner suits.

So, my wife stays home for the second visit. A Time Warner representative shows up, looks at the line running between the telephone pole and the house and says we need a new line. He doesn't turn on the TVs, nor does he check the signal strength. Oh, and something else. He doesn't run the new wire. That will take another visit.

The third technician gets the new outside cable installed. We turn on the two TVs. Same problem.

"Hello out there. Ya think the cable downstairs might be getting a weaker signal?"

The technician says that someone else will have to come out — he just installs outside cable.

At this point I make my first call to the Time Warner service department to question the deployment strategy of their field technicians.

I ask to speak to a supervisor, and am told that one will have to call me back. I also ask that my service record be updated to include my request for a supervisor to call. No one ever calls me back.

Visit No. 4. Another tech arrives. Glory be! He has a meter to test the strength of the signal going to each cable box. And guess what? The signals are vastly different: upstairs is about +12 and downstairs is about -6. Hmmmm. Sounds like the downstairs cable needs to be replaced. But wait, there's more! You guessed it, he doesn't run the inside cable. Another

appointment will have to be arranged. Remember service compartmentalization?

I now place my second call to talk to a supervisor. Again, a supervisor will have to call me back, and by the way, there's no mention in my service record that I asked to talk to a supervisor the last time. Again, I ask that my request be documented and hang up.

For four hours on a rainy Saturday I wait for my next visitation from Time Warner. No one shows up. I call. The weather is blamed. I ask to reschedule. They'll call me back to arrange another appointment. No one calls back.

I call again. A sixth appointment is scheduled and, by the way Mr. Egan, there's nothing in your record about your asking for a supervisor to call. Just for fun, I again request that a supervisor call me back, and that my request be documented. Who knows, maybe I can break the record for unsuccessful attempts to contact a supervisor.

All of which leads me to today, Thursday, May 9, 2002, as I write this column and once again rearrange my schedule for the sixth appointment for tomorrow afternoon.

Assuming Time Warner is finally successful, it will have taken six visits and eighteen days to get my cable service upgraded to digital.

Now that I review this saga, I'm starting to think that death by snapping turtle is too good for those Time Warner suits.

So, what are the questions to be answered? For starters, how come a supervisor never called me back, and there's no record of my request? How come I could log six service calls in three weeks, and no one thinks to question what's going on? How come the service techs are so compartmentalized in their skill sets and assigned tasks that they can only perform one limited function?

And finally, do we, as customers, have to put up with this type of service from a regulated monopoly? If you think the answer is no, then contact Bill Stockard, who works for the town of Chapel Hill and is the liaison between the town and Time Warner. Bill's e-mail address is bstockard@townofchapelhill.org, and it's his job to log customer complaints and pass them on to Time Warner. If you've got a current or old complaint, Bill should hear it.

As for me, a satellite dish is looking better and better

P.S. — No technician came Friday. When called, Time Warner said the appointment was for Thursday.

Readers may write to Bruce Egan c/o The Chapel Hill Herald, 106 Mallette St., Chapel Hill, NC 27516.

Handwritten signature: B. Egan 5/12/02

Still wired about Time Warner Cable

Two weeks ago I regaled you with my seemingly endless Time Warner saga. I'll summarize for those of you who missed the first installment. In short, I had two new digital cable boxes installed, one upstairs and one downstairs. The upstairs unit worked right away, but it took an additional six visits from the Time Warner service folks to finally get the downstairs box to work.

The service techs, a mix of contractors and Time Warner employees, were very nice and friendly, and good at the one specific job they were assigned to do. Unfortunately, if doing their one task didn't fix the problem, they didn't have the tools or the supplies to do anything else, so another service visit was the only way to try the next repair strategy.

This type of "service compartmentalization" is very efficient for Time Warner, in that they keep their service techs busy doing one task, over and over. However, it's hell for the customer who has to keep taking time off from work or other responsibilities and wait at home for Time Warner to show up sometime during a four-hour period in the morning, or a four-hour period in the afternoon.



**Bruce
Egan**
Columnist

Actually, it almost took a seventh visit to fix our downstairs system. The last service tech replaced a length of downstairs cable, but we still couldn't receive all the channels. He was about to arrange for the seventh visit, when my son wandered downstairs and asked the service tech if he had reset the cable box.

To do this, you push and hold the "Power" button for five seconds, which then causes the box to reset, thereby finding all the channels it couldn't previously "see" because of the bad wiring downstairs. My son reset the box, and everything was fine. Why didn't the service tech reset the box? He didn't know you needed to do that ...

The local Time Warner representative has been sympathetic to my plight, and anxious to make me a happy customer. He has offered me one month of free cable. I appreciate the gesture, but meanwhile a number of people have stopped me on the street to regale me with their own tales of cable hell, and I doubt all of them got a free month of cable.

Complaints I have heard from other cable subscribers involve numerous visits to make a repair, or work being promised or half-started, but completed only after numerous complaints. Stories also surfaced about billing

mistakes, in particular when service is cancelled, cable boxes returned, and the monthly statements keep coming. And, most interestingly, folks told me that they, too, would ask to make a complaint and there is a frustration of

people

That last item is of particular interest to me, since I suspect that our community officials simply may not be aware of the number of complaints circulating about Time Warner service. And it was news to me that in Chapel Hill there is a town employee, Bill Stockard, who is responsible for fielding complaints from town residents about the cable service. (You can e-mail Stockard at bstockard@townofchapelhill.org if you have cable complaints of your own.) I don't know if Carrboro, Hillsborough or other parts of Orange County have a similar resource, but I hope so.

So, what can be done? Just focusing on Chapel Hill for now, I think the next step is to somehow widely advertise the fact that Time Warner customers can contact Bill Stockard regarding any problems they are encountering with their cable. More advertising of this fact may result in the town becoming more aware of problems with cable.

As to how to pay for the advertising, maybe the town of Chapel Hill could fund notifications in the local newspapers, or other media outlets. Or how about including a notice in our OWASA bills, or some other mail that is sent out to all town residents? A notice could also be posted on the town's Web site.

Another possibility is for me to take Time Warner to small claims court. Despite the offer of one month of free cable, I have chewed up a considerable amount of my own time "waiting for the cable guy." If I received a ruling in my favor, with compensation, I could use the money to place the ads. Of course I don't know if I could present such a case in small claims court. Any lawyers out there want to give me free advice on that one?

Or maybe there's a smarter, less expensive way to get the word out. If you have an idea, drop me a line at eganb@aol.com with your suggestions. And I also want to hear about your own cable hell experiences.

Readers may write to Bruce Egan c/o The Chapel Hill Herald, 106 Mallette St., Chapel Hill, NC 27516.

5/26/02 WDE



May 17, 2002

Mr. Bruce Egan
1904 Overland Drive
Chapel Hill, NC 27517-2347

Dear Mr. Bruce Egan

I have read your article in the Chapel Hill Herald. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to bring your concerns to our attention. I apologize for any inconvenience you may have experienced. We rely on feedback from our customers to let us know how our service can be improved. Your article is a very important part of our ongoing commitment to implement procedures to assure our customers are receiving the best service possible.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you. I understand that we have completed the rewiring of your first floor outlet and that your Digital Cable is now operating properly. We have authorized a one month credit to your account of \$110.53. A statement generated on May 11th shows your balance as \$93.54. After the applied credit, you have no balance due with an actual credit balance of \$16.99 this will show on your next statement.

We appreciate you as one of our valued customers and look forward to providing you with the best in entertainment choices. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to give my assistant, Pat Stinemire, a telephone call at (919) 573-7320.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Van Name'.

Chris Van Name
Vice President/General Manager
Raleigh Division/Central District
Time Warner Cable

From the Desk of Bruce Egan

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

June 5, 2002

Chris Van Name
Vice President/General Manager
Raleigh Division, Time Warner Cable

Mr. Van Name,

Thank you for your letter of May 17, 2002. I appreciate your concern regarding our experience with the installation of digital cable at my home in Chapel Hill. And I appreciate the efforts of Mel Tinger, from TWC, and Bill Stockard, from the Town of Chapel Hill, to resolve my cable problems. I also appreciate your authorizing \$110.53 credit on my account.

My two columns have apparently struck a nerve in the community. People have stopped me on the street to regale me with their own TWC stories, which often consist of the same elements as mine – the need for repeated visits, and the inability to reach a supervisor to complain.

As frustrated as I was with the delay in getting my cable problems resolved, I am more concerned about the quality control and customer feedback aspects of my situation. It is frustrating to ask repeatedly for a supervisor to contact me, to ask repeatedly that my request be documented, and having neither occur, repeatedly.

I am interested in discussing with TWC and the Town of Chapel Hill any ideas for a customer feedback mechanism through which TWC and the community can mutually benefit. Thanks for your time and consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Bruce Egan

Cc:

Bill Stockard, Town of Chapel Hill
Town Council, Town of Chapel Hill

Time Warner Cable/Road Runner Experiences

Examples of Negative Comments

The following are emails received by Bruce Egan regarding problems with Time Warner customer service/support, either for cable TV, or RoadRunner ISP, or both.

(Note: Personal identification has been removed from the following emails.)

.....

Hi Bruce,

I received your email and had a similar experience. I was only trying to get digital cable at this point, not roadrunner. But I had to meet the cable guys several time (5-6) and it even got to be a joke with me and my coworkers about meeting the cable guys--even though they were different each time. This one could only put the box in. The next had to test the signal and then didn't have what he needed to fix it. Then someone was schedule to put in an amplifier. Next they decided the outside cable wire from the street was so old it needed to be replaced. That took 2 different people because one had to be run underground and the other had to be run above ground, but the guy didn't have a ladder high enough--he had to call someone else in with a cherry picker to finish the job! Finally, about 5-6 weeks later, everything was installed and working as it should have been (it was working to get cable during most of this work--just some of the channels were of lesser quality or not working well for awhile. The other frustrating thing is that one of the promotions they offered me, does not show up on my bill properly (and they say there's no way to fix it in their system to bill me correctly), so every month I have to call in to get my \$4.10 credit (which I have to explain is in the notes section of my record and how much the credit should be, etc. and this process takes me 10-20 minutes each month! It's been very aggravating. To their credit--the digital cable is good and has more channels for less than I was paying with my satellite dish, but it sure has been a frustrating experience!

Thanks for representing us!

.....

Oh, yeah. Been there, done that, hated it. I went through some painful issues to get my cable modem service resolved. In the Fall, I started

having connectivity problems around noon each day only when it was sunny out. I complained and complained. Spent many afternoons home so that they could visit and diagnose the problem. Almost everytime they came out, it was back online, so there was nothing to daignose. There must have been 6 or 7 visits with no resolution. When it went down, it was down for hours.

I actually had to go visit a supervisor in their home office (in this case, in RTP near the airport). Totally freaked them out a customer would come to their office. I spoke with a supervisor and he acted like he was shocked that my problem had not been resolved and escalated the problem. A few more visits and someone finally figured it out. TWC installed some filter on my line when I discontinued cable TV service (I use DirecTiVo). This has wreaking havoc with the cable modem service whenever the sun shined on the splicing box out in the yard. Tech removed it and not a single problem since.

I actually have a new problem I'm trying to resolve now, but it's all related to billing. Setting up automatic payment is proving to be a formidable challenge to them.

.....

I'm with you...personally I went for literally years without a TV by choice at one point rather than pay a dime to cable companies I was that furious with them.

With the sterling track record they bring to video I've always wondered why people want to get data from them. I understand if there isn't an alternative in their area, but given the choice, I continue to be surprised why anyone would choose cable modem over DSL. At least the telcos have some clue about how data should work.

.....

Bruce,

I'm an ex-TWC/RR user; for a whole host of reasons, I'm back to using a 56K dialup (my apartment wiring won't support DSL. .!)Here are some of the highlights:

I signed up for RR almost 2 years ago, after several abortive attempts to get BellSouth's Fast Access (ancient wiring in my apartment complex, apparently). TWC was running some special combo offer for cable users (I think it was an extra \$10 for basic cable) and as I didn't (and currently don't!) subscribe to cable, it seemed a bargain . . . Then the fun started.

TWC boasted a "on time or it's free" installation offer. Given that I rarely even use my allotted vacation time, I was loathe to be absent from work for long, so this guarantee gave me some hope of a quick and simple installation. More about that, later.

My first warning, which I should have heeded, was when I attempted to contact TWC for the RR installation. I placed a call to the local (Chapel Hill) TWC office expecting to encounter a minimum of delays - they were, after all, running a special, time-limited offer. Upon negotiating the inevitable menu, I waited over 45 MINUTES on hold, after a message which I freely admit had indicated that "previous callers waited over 6 minutes" for a response. Indeed. After the 45-minute wait, their local office had closed for the day and no one was available to take my call.

I called again the following morning (I'm more than normally persistent, and had no other high-speed options), waited again for another half-hour, only to be informed, at the end of my wait, that I should call another, unadvertised- and un-mentioned (on the menu) number. The lady who answered my call not only did not offer to transfer the call, but seemed positively offended when I requested it after my long wait. Seems this company, now marketing a leading-edge technology, didn't have the capacity to transfer calls from one division to another. Another omen ignored.

After yet another wait (about an hour, this time - thank Buddha for speakerphones!), I finally connected with the RoadRunner folks and arranged for installation - about two weeks hence. I established that I did in fact have a PC, an Ethernet card, and a cable outlet near the PC. About that "on time or it's free" guarantee - TWC apparently believes that anytime within a 4-HOUR window constitutes being on time - not MY idea of punctuality. And they still managed NOT to be "on time" - twice.

On the first occasion, I waited patiently one whole morning from 8:00 to noon, to no avail. When I finally (about 1:00) called the local office, after the usual 30-minute+ wait, the dispatcher expressed some regret and surprise at the installers' tardiness - and indicated that he didn't usually get any updates from the field (!!?). We scheduled another date, and I was promised a free (as opposed to ~ \$60) installation per the guarantee.

About 1 week later (the earliest opening, I was told), at about 12:30 p.m., 30 minutes late and following two VERY spirited discussions with the

dispatcher, I heard a knock on the door. When I opened it, two extremely disreputable-looking specimens produced TWC IDs and identified themselves as the installer and his assistant. Absent the IDs, I would never have allowed them across the threshold - their unkempt appearance inspired not confidence, but some alarm instead. Installation was brisk - after a quick call to the office to arrange for configuration of some connection that was supposed to have been ready - and consisted simply of connecting a cable modem to the cable outlet and checking the connection for a signal. The assistant observed.

When the installer presented me with the service agreement, I noticed the installation charge and reminded him that not only did he arrive late, but that the previously-scheduled installation hadn't taken place, either, and that I was entitled to free installation. He expressed some regret, said that he wasn't empowered to waive the charge, but that it would no doubt be credited "back at the office" during the billing. I reluctantly signed the agreement, after noting thereon that installation was late - again, and that I expected to be credited accordingly. I wasn't.

When I got my first bill, I had indeed been charged for the installation at the normal rate. One more 30-minute wait, another discussion with a disempowered and no doubt frustrated staffer, and we settled the installation credit. In the course of our discussion I warned her that TWC would, if justice prevailed, lose its local monopoly on high-speed Internet connections, at which point I would transfer my service to ANY other available supplier.

About 9 months later, I recanted - and sacrificed my "variable-speed" and occasionally absent TWC connection for an ordinary 56K dialup connection. RoadRunner was, indeed, lightning-fast - at least between about 10:00 at night and 7:00 in the morning. At other times, speed frequently dropped to as slow as 128Kbps on the download (I checked periodically with DSL Reports' transfer rate utility) depending, probably, on the load from other users. On two occasions, once for almost a week, service disappeared altogether. Calls to the office triggered the usual 30- to 60-minute wait followed by disinterested responses from the help desk, so I finally disconnected the modem and delivered it in person to the local TWC office with a request for termination of service. I also devoted a couple of minutes to a discussion with the representative, announcing my intention to tell as many people as possible, "exactly what had happened" during my association with TWC. A few days later an "uninstaller" appeared at my doorstep, requesting my cable modem; I sent him away. On my next and final bill there appeared a charge for approximately \$250, for a cable modem - and some warning about possible collection efforts. I ignored this bill and the subsequent one as well, terminally frustrated.

I'm currently looking for a new apartment or perhaps even a house, and availability of DSL is a critical factor for me - I work for UNCH in an IT capacity, and anticipate working from home from time to time. I haven't inquired about cable TV availability, as I haven't subscribed since my experience with TWC, now over a year in the past. Periodically I have confirmed via AOL, Earthlink, Covad, AT&T, and BellSouth that my present location still prohibits DSL connections - but I haven't given up hope.

.....

Bruce,

My wife and I moved from our apartment in Chapel Hill to a house we bought in Durham. We put in a work order to have our service *moved* - we were early roadrunner customers and had early, read good, email addresses - they closed our account and we lost our e-mail accounts for about two weeks.

Once they setup up at our new house - it took a few calls to get them to turn the service on correctly and then we were fortunately able to recover our e-mail accounts, but we lost a few weeks of mail.

At our old address we had several problems with the quality of the digital cable (TV) service. The picture was at times terrible. Time Warner was never able to tell us why... they kept on trying the same things and the same things never worked.

Hope this helps,

.....

My experience with RR in S. Durham near RTP (I've been a customer for about a year) has been very mixed. An initial bad cable hookup took 3 weeks to solve, and was followed by 8 months of increasingly intermittent connectivity problems (for three months at the end we had an average of 12 connectivity failures per day, about half of these regularly lasting a half hour or more). All in all I logged about 15 regular work days at home waiting for RR technicians, some of whom never showed up. I escalated the problem early and often, and was eventually put in direct contact with the cable maintenance supervisor for our area. He initiated some brave assaults on the problem, but eventually (without succeeding in fixing it) lapsed into an uncommunicative state. Similarly, the second line support supervisor

routinely failed to return calls or provide status when promised. All this despite the fact that they had acknowledged a noise problem in their system (not the house wiring or gear) that was "affecting over 25% of the modems in the node" and about which they were receiving calls from other customers in our neighborhood. Finally, when I escalated the second line support supervisor and made various other threats, "management" made the decision to "replace everything in the node." Since then we've had perfect, high speed, uninterrupted service for 2.5 months. We received a rebate of one month's charge on our account for the whole 8-month ordeal. The new piece of coax they put in from the street 3 months ago (which in the end had nothing to do with the problem) is still lying unburied on my lawn ...

I think the moral of all these stories is: if the service is bad in your neighborhood, there's no good reason for it. You're paying the same amount as people who are getting excellent service, there's just some equipment or configuration problem that hasn't been addressed, repaired or replaced in your local area. You're going to have to fight to be heard and treated properly, but the fight is winnable.

.....

I ... feel your pain on the Roadrunner issue. I live in Raleigh, and we have similar problems. My friends have told me stories, and I know first hand how poor Roadrunner service is. I was taking a C++ programming class last fall which required me to do online labs and gather assignments from the class website. However, it took Roadrunner several weeks to get the cable modem to work properly. My roommates took care of the appointments, which cost them valuable personal and class time, but my inconvenience came when I attempted to do my assignments. Eventually, the service was restored, but not before I had missed a lab deadline and was forced to outsource my internet connection to the labs on campus. Also, since then, the connection has been intermittent, which is somewhat understandable, but there needs to be a better way to issue a complaint and perhaps some sort of compensation when the service does fail. Broadband internet, while imperfect, is a wonderful thing, but it unfortunately can only be as good as the service provider. I hope this helps in your presentation, as while I do not live in Chapel Hill, you can see that it isn't just your town that is affected. If you have

any further questions, feel free to email me. Thanks.

.....

My RR was installed in spring of 2001 and was working by the end of the summer. I believe I have had two long outages since then, both apparently related to the original problem -- bad amps on the local cable lines or TW tuning the network to my disadvantage (and I imagine to other customers' advantage). The latter is an obvious cause for concern, but I have no way of confirming it. Maybe I'm just paranoid.

They've replaced the line to my house from the pole twice. It didn't matter that they tested the signal at the pole and it was just as bad. Both times this 'repair' took a week or more and delayed the inevitable conclusion that the problem was on their network, not mine. The last time it went down hard, it took a call to the town's cable rep to get T-W interested in correcting the problem. I don't think it was a full hour between my conversation with the town rep and T-W's call to me. After that it was only a day or so before everything was working again. (Squeak, squeak!)

When it's working, the speed between home and campus is very nice. I have seen 2Mb downloads and sometimes as good as 300Kb uploads. And it's been several months since my service crapped out for more than an hour. I think I've had the same DHCP lease for at least 90 days. That's a good sign.

But I do recommend a good night's sleep and some meditation before dealing with their customer support.

.....

I've had mixed success with RR. I lived in my last apartment for about a year and had great service. Maybe restarted my modem all of 3 or 4 times. Then I moved a block down the road in the same complex, and now I lose my IP address for a week about once a month. Despite these hitches, I still recommend RR to those who ask.

And hey, at least they credit my account!

.....

Here is a tip from someone who has been both an employee as well as a customer of various ISPs - If the company has more than 50 employees, there IS NO Customer Service. You would imagine that this statement is completely flawed -- "With more employees, certainly there would be more people to answer the phones and deal with customers??"

Sadly, no. The larger a company grows (which usually correlates to market success and financial gain), the less and less important One Little Customer becomes (or even a small branch of your local government). All they care about at that point is the positive cashflow and expanding their reach. Along with our weakening economy, jobs are being cut rapidly - these front-line folks are, in many cases, the first to go - the higher-ups /really/ like to keep their jobs.

What it boils down to is: fewer techs who become overworked and overstressed and start to care less and less. Call hold times skyrocket. Lapses in call-backs increase. I don't blame the techs; I blame their management. Perhaps reporting such inconveniences to City Council will result in a refund (which is a good thing), but I believe the problem is more pervasive and perhaps harder to solve. Until businesses make an effort to become more client-focused (instead of always looking at the bottom line), then I don't see these issues going away.

MyAdditional2Cents,

.....

My regular old analog cable sucked for three years because of the same issue. 'Oh, you want a picture without snow? That costs extra.' I bought an amp at Radio Shack and it helped a little.

They finally put a good one in 'gratis' when I suggested that for the extra \$60/month I was spending for digital cable and RR, I was kind of expecting them to give me a signal that their expensive little boxes would be able to see.

You're reminded me why I hate them and have started my blood boiling all over again!

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Hi,

I got your email and wanted to share my experience because it was equally frustrating. My husband and I have digital cable and actually have had no problems, but recently decided to get Roadrunner service. It has been a nightmare. An installer named X came to install roadrunner on May 13th. Before I made arrangements with TimeWarner, I called Bell South to compare who had a better deal and to tell them both that I had problems with my floppy disk drive and make sure that wouldn't be a problem. Time Warner promised it wouldn't be a problem and that they could do a full installation so that when they were done it would be ready to go. It was important to me that we wouldn't have to do any of the installation ourselves because I work 50 hours a week and don't have time. While the installer was at our house, I called home to talk to my husband. Because my husband comes from another country, the installer asked to talk to me. He said because my floppy drive wasn't working he couldn't do the installation, but that he would leave instructions for me so that I could log on to the TW website from my dial-up service and then do the installation myself. I told him that was unacceptable because that was his job, I was promised that timewarner would do the complete installation, and if he needed to install it from the website rather than a floppy disk, then that is what I expected him to do. He told me it wasn't his job to work on broken computers and then gave the phone back to my husband. But, when I arrived home, my husband said that he was told by the installer that he was able to complete the installation and all the paperwork left behind said "complete installation." The computer was connected to the internet when he left and we just assumed it was through TimeWarner highspeed. We turned off the computer later that evening and the next day when we tried to use our new DSL connection, there was absolutely no indication that roadrunner had ever been installed. We played with it for hours, and couldn't figure out anyway to get on the internet other than our regular dial up service. By Saturday I was totally frustrated and called TimeWarner to complain. They put me in touch with a Roadrunner technician and we spent 2 hours trying to troubleshoot over the phone. It was the last thing I wanted to be doing on a Saturday and I kept telling her that I just wanted them to send a technician out to fix it, because I didn't have time for this and that I had paid for an installation and that is what I expected. Finally, after trying everything she could think of, she said that it appeared that there was no connection and nothing she could do, so she would have an installer call me. Two hours later, an installer called and we set up an appointment for the someone to come out at 9:00 am on Wed, May 22nd. They assured me someone would come promptly at 9:00 so I'd only miss an hour of work. On wednesday, I waited until 10:00 and noone showed up so I called

TimeWarner to find out why. They said they had no record of a service call, but that they would call the installers and send someone out as soon as possible. Around 11:30 an installer called to say that they had no record of the appointment and that noone was available to come at that time. Unfortunately, I hadn't asked for the name of the person I spoke with that Saturday, but I was upset enough that they said they would make my appointment a priority. Then they told me that the same installer, X, had to be the one to come back or he wouldn't get paid for the original installation. They told me that X could come that evening. I told them that I had to work late, because I was now 3 hours late for work. They said that X would come at 7:30 that evening. That still meant that even with working late, I was still an hour short on my work hours that day. I rushed home at 7:00 so I would be there for X, who never showed up. He called the next afternoon to "set up a time with me." I wasn't home and was not able to call him back until the following Monday. Again, he said he would call me that evening at 7:00 and if I was home, he would come take care of the problem. He never called and around 10:00 I went to bed. At 10:58 that evening, X called. I didn't answer the phone because I was sleeping, but the next morning I could see on my caller I.D that it was him. He left no message. I found this incredibly irresponsible that he would call so late, after not following through on 2 appointments. I called TimeWarner and said that I wanted credit for the two weeks that I was being charged for RR service, made a formal complaint against X, and said I wanted someone else to come out and fix the installation. Again, they said they would have an installer call to set up a time. 2 days later, I still hadn't received a call, so I called back again. This time, on the message they play while your on hold, I heard them say that if they don't show up or show up late for a service call they will credit your account \$20.00. I told them that I wanted my account credited for the 3 times that noone showed up and I was forced to wait. They told me that because technically my roadrunner hadn't been properly installed, these were still installation calls, not service calls and that I could not have credit on my account. However, they did schedule another appointment with an installer for 6:30 that evening (June 4th, more than 3 weeks after the initial installation). Y, the installer that came that evening was great. He told us that the installation had never been completed and that the cable had been hooked up incorrectly. He showed us what all the problems were, made sure everything was working correctly, and gave us suggestions for better service (upgrade our amount of memory and directions for how to do that). Our interaction with Y was very positive, but overall the entire experience with Timewarner was unbelievably frustrating, time-consuming, aggravating, patronizing, and disturbing. I'm sorry that you have had a similar experience, but I am really glad that you are trying to do something about it. I am happy to support you in anyway. Sorry my message got so wordy and long. I'm still very annoyed by the whole thing. Let me know if you need any further information.

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I can add a tidbit from yesterday AM. My RR went out at 5am. (I know this from logs I leave scrolling all the time.) At 6:45am I called in, but got a message that if I wanted local support I better call back after 7am. I waited and called at 7:10. I spent fifteen minutes on the phone with a support person who had me power-cycle my modem twice and reboot my computer, etc, etc. This guy told me no work was being done in my area, that there were no network problems. He then transferred me to someone else, who started over with the reboots, etc. After ten minutes he decided to check for system work. Bingo. There's an outage in my area and an engineer had been dispatched earlier that morning.

Only 30 minutes of annoyance and three hours of down time. But it baffles me how they could waste all of that time, mine and theirs, when there was already a reported network problem. Makes me wonder what sort of system they have set up for trouble tickets and network monitoring.

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Bruce,

I had to rush to send this email about TWC.

All I can say is: DITTO here. But I have given up...

The latest saga in late 2001 involved poor picture quality on the "higher channels". From installing a new cable here, a new cable there, to following the (nice) expert from pole to pole on my street who was checking the strength of the incoming signal (not enough he said, way not enough DB). I finally left him on the 4th pole where TWC's amplifiers (I think that's what they call them) were mounted and he still said, "not enough here either".

No word from TWC for 4 weeks despite my calling several times.

Like you said. No documentation, always starting new and "passing on to the Tech Department". They wanted to install amplifiers in my house. I refused, my house was not the problem. A few more attempts, another cable replacement to(RG6) and I gave up.

TWC is the worst example of monopoly power gone mad. I am looking into satellite now. In fact I will buy a satellite

dish and receiver overseas and bring it over, because I want to be in control and not beholden to the "disinterested entity on the other end of the phone". I am switching to PAL TV system equipment so that it will work.(I hope!)

PLEASE use your public clout to reign them in by getting the town to attract/allow competition! Besides, at \$36plus per month, who can afford it? I watch 5 channels, id' be happy to pay for those.

Thanks for this article, it will stir people up!

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Dear Mr. Stockard,

I am writing you about Time Warner Cable. They are presenting the same problems for me as they have for Bruce Egan, a columnist with the Chapel Hill Herald. This Thursday will be the fifth time TWC has come to my house to try and get my cable and high speed cable modem taken care of. I have waited hour upon hour with no recompense for these people to do their job. I, too, have the problem of people coming out here with little or no expertise in what the problem is. I wait hours at a time only to be told within 5 minutes of the technician's arrival that it is "not what he does." Come on now, this cable company has the town and it's citizens by the throat monopolistically and yet the town keeps renewing the contract of a company that has bumlbers and nincompoops for employees. I had two guys out the other day who were promising, X and Y, but they too let me down even after I wrote a commendation to TWC for their effort. The cable modem worked exactly one day before breaking down again. Anyway, I am really tired of waiting for these people to come out and unless they find a way to pay me what I earn hourly, then enough should be enough.

Thank you for your attention.

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Thank your for taking matters personally in hand. Meanwhile I called Time Warner yesterday and asked when the cable would be buried but the lady who took my call could find no record of the installation in her computer. She said that therefore she would enter it herself and the burying of the cable would take place in 21 days. I was really dismayed at this, saying that if the information was not entered in the computer it wasn't my fault and they certainly should have a record of the inside installation taking place on April 24. No, it appeared she had no way of checking that information.

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I have been amused reading your description of your tribulations with Time Warner. Unfortunately, you have barely broken the surface of available misery with the company.

And you are correct, one part of the company doesn't seem to have a clue what the others are doing. For example, I ordered Road Runner when it was available for my area (near Orange High School). The installer could not get it to work well, but said that he would have someone check it "at the office.." to see if speed could be improved. His truck was still in sight, turning at the end of the block, when it stopped working. I immediately called TW to have him to return, to be told that I would have to make and appointment... You know the drill. I won't bore you, nor do I have time to relate the details of the FIVE MONTHS of continuing and constant efforts to get the service to work satisfactorily. New lines were buried, dozens of service visits were made. After many, many, hours of inconvenience on my part, it was determined that the service was not available in my area yet!!! They said that the sales department should not have been selling it yet, although I knew that more people in my area had subscribed to the service, because the service technicians would frequently mention that they had additional calls nearby whenever they were working at my home. It was six additional months before the lines were upgraded in my area and that it officially became available (during which time they did not charge me.)

The most frustrating thing with the company is a customer's inability to talk with anyone in "management" about problems. Try asking a customer "service" agent on the telephone for the name and telephone number of anyone in management. They will say that they are not allowed to give out that information! Ask for the location of the administrative offices. Again, that information is not available to customers. (Perimeter Park, Morrisville). In frustration, I called the Orange County Commissioners office with the problem, and was directed to the assistant manager's office, but he was out due to an automobile accident. His secretary was extremely nice, but advised that she could not give out any telephone numbers or names for TW. When I responded that I could come to her office and read the franchise agreement, she advised that the information that I wanted was not on the document. When I told her that under the Freedom of Information Act, I could (I hoped) come to her office and look for contact information, she asked that if she had someone from TW call me within five minutes, would that satisfy me. When I agreed, she did, and someone called. From that, I was eventually able to get a couple of telephone numbers and names.

It is extremely frustrating dealing with a company whose performance is so poor, that they will not give any information about names of management, location of their administrative office, or telephone numbers. The CIA could learn something from this company. Something is definitely wrong when a company franchised by local government is allowed to operate in such a manner.

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