

When you lose your internet service...

I meant to post earlier in the week. However, Verizon “inadvertently” cut my FIOS line—so I had no TV or internet Wednesday into Thursday. Yes, this is a first world problem. Regardless, it had to be resolved, which involved the thing I despise the most in the world: calling Verizon customer service.

And it was just as bad as I feared. First you have to get through a phone tree (I can’t stand talking to machines). And then I got disconnected. Then, when I called back, the phone tree was stuck on whether I had power at my location or not. Thanks Verizon, for thinking I am that stupid that I would think that without electricity I would have working TV/internet. On the third try, I went for the Spanish option, from which I was able to finally speak to an agent (whose command of Spanish was not the best as he was versed in Spanglish more than Spanish).

To make a long story short, after more than 24 hours without service and after several calls to support, my FIOS is back on a temporary line that will eventually have to be buried (meaning I am still not done with Verizon).

I work from home, so having internet access is essential for me. Yes, I have a smartphone so I wasn’t entirely disconnected from the world wide web, but try proofreading a brochure on your smartphone. Not so easy.

The only positive from this fiasco is that it sparked this blog post. Here’s what I learned from losing my internet service:

1.The measure of a company is how it responds to customer problems. Verizon does not do well on this measure. Verizon,

like most companies, is fine *as long as you don't have a problem*. Verizon makes it very hard for customers to talk to customer service agents. It makes customers run around in circles: repeat information, navigate phone trees and so forth. I lost a whole day of service PLUS more than an hour getting someone to help PLUS using data on my phone PLUS having to go somewhere to be able to access the internet to do work PLUS waiting during a three-hour window. If I call to request a credit, I may be compensated for the service loss but not for my time and certainly not for the aggravation. I am sure Verizon is betting that I won't want to lose more time on this, and it may be right. As I said before, I despise calling Verizon's customer service.

2. Monopolies like Verizon have no incentive to be customer-centric and they don't advertise or promote their customer service. If you notice, all FIOS advertising is about what great speeds you will have or any other benefits of having WORKING service. There's no mention of the great customer service that accompanies this "super-fast" internet because there is none.

3. Some companies provide better customer service via social media. Verizon does not. Several years ago this was not true. You could get better, faster service from Twitter since @verizonsupport agents seemed to be more empowered than those on the 1-800 number. Now, if you complain on Twitter, Verizon reps will quickly want to move you over to direct message so that they can give you a link to report your problem. Agents on @verizonsupport seem to have little or no ability to actually help or intervene in your favor, unlike @deltaassist, which has the ability to rebook your flight, etc.

4. The problem is with company policies not with employees. It's been my experience that people want to help, but they are forced to follow company policies and procedures, which are not customer-friendly. The technician that came to my house was far more helpful and on the ball than the agents on the

1-800 line. He was empowered to do what he had to do to fix the problem, whereas the agents in the call center were forced to call other departments and work within constraints.

5. You must have a “plan b” or “plan c.” If something fails (you could lose power, or your car is in the shop or any other unexpected problem), you have to find a work around. In this case, my county libraries all offer wi-fi, and have desks with power outlets. That was the way to get some work done for me.

And lastly, on a personal note:

6. I have to try to stop sweating the small stuff. I get upset because I expect things to work and work well. And they often don't. Yesterday, I was reminded that our time on earth can be very short and you just don't know how life will turn out, so perhaps worrying about Verizon is a complete waste of time. I had my annual eye doctor appointment, and the usual optometrist was not there. I was shocked and very sorry to learn that she died suddenly after an aggressive illness. She was around my age. She was a very nice person and I always enjoyed chatting with her. The doctor told me she had been very healthy and health-conscious, but this illness came out of nowhere. She was gone in a matter of weeks. Rest in peace Teresa, you are missed.

Enjoy your Labor Day weekend! How did we get to the last weekend of “official” summer so fast? Sigh.

Advertising is not enough

Say you want to sell something. You think: I'll place an ad to get buyers. Buyers will come, see the item and pay for it. Deal done. For simple transactions, this simple paradigm works. Take note of all the individual ads for used furniture, bikes and other stuff on Craigslist.

However, there must be more thought put in when you are trying to market for a large store, retail operation or national distributor. First, you are selling more than one item. When you are advertising for a larger operation you are trying to accomplish at least two things. One is to move product and another is to get people in your store. The idea being that if someone is there to buy 2-for-1 widgets, he or she may also buy some gadgets.

So your ad agency created a great ad, the pricing is great both for the customer and for your bottom line, and you've done a comprehensive media buy. All you have to do now is sit back and wait. Right? Wrong!

Retailers, from the smallest to the largest, have to be a bit more proactive. First, they have to make sure they have enough stock of what they are attempting to sell. Second, they have to have contingency plans if the demand is too large. Are you going to honor the same price when a new shipment arrives? Are you going to give rainchecks?

In short, advertising must be connected to your operations and customer service policies.

Let me share a misadventure I had at a well known office supply store (email me if you want the name). They had advertised a certain desk chair on sale. On the second day of the sale, I showed up at a store and wanted to buy said desk chair. The store was "out of stock." In fact, most every store in the area was out of stock. I had to ask the manager

to locate stores with the chair in stock and both had only one chair. At no point did he offer to call and have the other store hold the chair for me. The manager also did not offer to give me a coupon or the same price on a similar chair. In fact, the whole experience was illustrative of terrible customer service, but also of the disconnect between advertising and operations.

The store had advertised a sale for an item that it did not have in stock. Perhaps it was bait and switch and perhaps it was the fault of the advertising manager. Whatever the reason, it did not result in a sale, quite the opposite, it resulted in an irritated potential customer who will think twice before going to this store for anything, much less anything advertised in the weekly circular.

Advertising gets people to the door but it does not make the sale. Customer service and sales staff make the sale.

The truth is advertising alone is rarely enough.