

# 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.

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

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# How to alienate people and lose customers

Some companies just don't get it. They actually seem to want to lose customers. Here are two examples.

## **Citibank**

Just one day after I wrote my last post on alienating customers, I got a letter from Citibank informing that my credit card account is changing. But not to fear, these changes include several "enhancements." But the changes are not enhancements. They are making the card even more useless—no more picture ID, no more 2% cash back for supermarket and drugstore purchases, AND, they are changing the name of the card and issuing a new number. The thing about the account number was in the last paragraph.

You know what this is: it is a way of further alienating me as a customer. Why? Because first, it insults my intelligence. I know an enhancement when I see one—it usually involves something positive for me as a customer. Second, it forces me to do some work. Now, I have to call places where I have recurring charges to change my card number. And third, it is giving me something I didn't ask for nor did I want AGAINST MY WILL, WITH NO OPT-OUT.

## **Verizon**

Although I have few service issues with Verizon, when I do, it is a nightmare to deal with this company. Its customer service truly is atrocious. I dread having to call them for anything. I usually get a phone tree, followed by an inept customer service rep who then drops the call when transferring me to the correct department. Just ugh. So, the idea of adding any services with this company is unthinkable.

Verizon seems to think that if they send me enough direct mail, I will buckle in and get FIOS. So, every single week, I get a minimum of one piece of direct mail with an offer to install FIOS. This week, I got three pieces. This has been going on for two years. Every time I see a letter from Verizon it goes in the trash and I think what a stupid company this is. Spending millions of dollars on direct mail, killing trees and for what? If they had an inkling on how to get customers they would figure out what customers want, and work on serving those needs first (better customer service comes to mind). Instead of doing real work, Verizon keeps sending useless direct mail. How many people are signing up? I bet not many.

How to alienate people and lose customers? Keep hitting them over the head with offers they don't want, insult their intelligence and make them do all the work. On that end, Citibank and Verizon, you are doing a great job.

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## Revenue is good, but not at the expense of profit

I came across an item in Reuters today that says that Verizon Communications had an increase in revenue (i.e more subscribers) but a decrease in profit in the third quarter of 2009. What this means is that the company's expenses are rising. Expenses could be anything from salaries to office supplies to marketing. One area where I believe Verizon is probably bleeding expenses is in marketing. I wrote before that I have received nearly five pounds of direct mail from

the company during the past year. Multiply five pounds by millions and you will get a sense of the amount of paper Verizon has generated just to market one product: FIOS. In my opinion, this is wasteful and useless.

If Verizon spent as much on customer service as on their repetitious direct mail campaign, they might have a more satisfied customer base. That would strengthen their revenue and profit streams.

This is just my opinion. I do not work for Verizon or any Verizon affiliated business or with any of Verizon's competitors. My only affiliation with Verizon is as a customer.

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## **Don't try the same trick over and over**

Here's a tip: if something does not work the first 50 times, don't do it again. Seriously. Stop. Re-evaluate. Don't waste your efforts.

Sure, practice makes perfect, if you are headed to Carnegie Hall. With marketing, practice (repetition) can lead to annoyance and disconnect.

Last November, I started collecting all the marketing mail that relates to FIOS, Verizon's fiber-optic service. To date, I have received nearly five pounds of direct mail and many robo-calls (although I finally got them to stop the robo-calls). Here's the clincher though: I have not signed up for FIOS. Verizon keeps sending me the same marketing pieces, over and over and over and over. Most egregious is the one that is

marked: **Important Information About Your Verizon Service.**  
Really, how many times do you think I am going to fall for this? Once, maybe twice, but not dozens.

I am not sure what Verizon's strategy is here, but in my case, they are wasting tons of money and not to mention, killing many trees (yeah, I know you want me to switch to paperless billing, but I bet if you just cut out excessive direct mail you would save a ton).

My other example is from a online listing service I used to pay for. It changed, without informing me, and suddenly, I was getting no inquiries or even visits to my website from it. I stopped paying for the premium service. I tried to inform them why. No feedback form or even email address was available. And the guy who runs the service sends me emails at least twice a week asking me to sign up again. The same exact email, twice a week. I am not exaggerating. Again, why would you continue to do something again and again if you are getting no results from it? Do you think I missed the email the first 25 times?

In any case, marketing communications is about strategy and tactics. You use certain tactics to implement your overall strategy. The thing is, you have many tactics at your disposal and you should fine tune your tactics so that you are achieving the result you want. If a tactic does not seem to work, shelve it. Put it away.

Your adaptability will help set you apart. Trust me on this. Don't waste your resources with tired tactics that don't work.

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# Now it's robo-calls

I am sure that you heard of the Republican National Committee's robo-calls during the 2008 election. People were very irritated to get them. And why wouldn't they? After all, it is bad enough to get an unsolicited call but then to pick up the phone to be greeted by a robotic voice? You can't talk back to a robot! You can't ask the caller to please never call you again. And what is most interesting is that there is no data that show that these types of calls work. Here is an article in Politico from earlier in the year pleading with the campaigns not to use robo-calls. The author claims that one of the main reasons that these calls are employed is because they are cheap.



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This leads me to the latest in the Verizon FIOS push. Today, I got a robo-call. My only guess is that Verizon is conducting a marketing experiment to see which method works. And hey, robo-calls are cheap! Especially if you are the phone company—you don't even have to pay for phone time. In my opinion, Verizon's marketing geniuses are thinking that somehow they will get me to sign up. So they will try each option numerous times. Meanwhile, have they checked the blogosphere for what is being said about them? No...haven't gotten a single comment. When I wrote about Comcast a few months ago, a representative contacted me to try to rectify the situation. Verizon does not care what you or I think. The



company only cares that you sign up for its services. I will tell you one reason I won't sign up for FIOS—because if something goes wrong with my TV/phone/Internet I will be forced to talk to Verizon. And I don't want to talk to Verizon, ever.

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## The hard sell

Used car (and for that new car) salespeople are known for driving a hard sell. And generally, consumers hate a hard sell. In fact, certain car dealerships (CarMax and Saturn) made their USP (unique selling proposition) the fact that what you see is what you get, and that you won't get hassled. Somehow, Verizon has not gotten the memo. I want to understand what the Verizon marketing folks are thinking, because from my perspective, they are driving a really hard sell, and not only that, they are being tremendously wasteful (not getting the ROI they should). As I mentioned a few days ago, Verizon is in the middle of selling FIOS. I have received about two marketing pieces a week (direct mail), three to four hangups from Verizon on my phone (telemarketing) and have been exposed to more Verizon TV ads than I care to think about. The bottom line is, as I have told Verizon, I AM NOT GETTING FIOS!!!! Stop selling me PLEASE!!!

At some point, they have to stop. But they won't. Why? Because they have spent millions of dollars in research, development and roll-out of FIOS and until every single Verizon customer signs up, they probably will not make up the difference. They may have miscalculated that people would be all over FIOS, or they rolled out FIOS at a time when people are cutting back on everything. In either case, Verizon believes that marketing FIOS will eventually bring in the numbers. Otherwise, they

would not spend the money. However, I think their approach is extremely wasteful (yes, even in an environmental way).

So, my bottom line is that Verizon is the used car salesperson I will avoid at all costs. I am not buying a car (or new TV/phone service) any time soon. So sell away but all you are doing is irritating me and making me consider alternatives.

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## **When does it become too much?**

In the case of Verizon FIOS, about 100 million messages ago. OK, I am exaggerating, they could have stopped at 1000. In all seriousness, Verizon is marketing the hell out of FIOS. They want everyone who has ever been near a Verizon phone to sign up. There is TV advertising, telemarketing (these people have been calling my house at least 3 times a week for the past 8 weeks easily, even though I already told them I AM NOT INTERESTED) and direct mail. I get a direct mail piece from them roughly once a week—whether it be a postcard or a full blown letter, like I got today. What a great offer...they will bundle TV, Internet and Phone for \$100 a month PLUS taxes and fees for one year (translation—you are locked in for a year no matter what and then your price will go up). Still, I am not interested. I hate Verizon, and this marketing onslaught is making me hate them more. At some point, the costs outweigh the returns, and the many dollars they are spending trying to get me to sign up are ill spent, especially since, as I mentioned before, I AM NOT INTERESTED. For anybody worried about the economy, I would like to point out that Verizon is both making money and spending money. They aren't asking for a government bailout, they are asking you to upgrade to their system. Of course, Comcast, their biggest competitor in this area, has a similar package. And they also try like hell to

get you to sign up for it. It makes me wonder how big those margins really are. They must be really big for there to be a decent ROI (return on investment) on this.