

I have been a Time Warner customer for many years and find the way it has behaved post the acquisition of the local cable company in my town reprehensible and reflective of predatory, non-competitive pricing.

I would not have written this note if it had not been for the fact that I was helping my father with his bill over the weekend when he discovered that his “basic” bill with some free trial services had grown to over \$225/month. Given that all he wanted was basic cable and internet for email, this seems like extortion.

When he called Time Warner to ask for a lower price plan, they did not readily disclose the “every day low cost plan” and instead tried pushing him to a higher plan. They also questioned him in an aggressive way as to whether or not email was the primary use of the plan.

Further, when he asked for basic cable and how to return a set top box, the representative said that there was no office in the 01257 zip code and that customers could not pay to ‘buy out’ their set top boxes. The only offer that TWC would make was to run a truck to the house for \$40, but then of course, someone needs to wait all day and hope they actually arrive.

Finally, the representative said that he could bring the boxes into a store (the reason the boxes need to come in is because if you don’t take the DVR service, you need to return your old box). When he asked to do this, the final retort from the TWC employee was “you just seem to want something on the cheap, so I am going to turn off your cable in 10 days.” This is not what he wanted: he just wanted an offer for basic cable that was \$25/month or less vs. ‘the best, special offer’ of \$100+.

I don’t understand how this is acceptable, but I take a couple learnings from it:

- 1) The fact that there is no viable competition in the area allows TWC to be callous towards its customers
- 2) TWC (and others) are using the set-top-box as a way to make it difficult for customers to downgrade service into appropriate plans
- 3) TWC’s ‘customer care’ tries to intimidate people into not moving toward more affordable pricing
- 4) TWC is using its monopoly services in the area to ‘migrate’ up customers monthly costs as it is hard to find an alternative

Given this fact pattern, I find it difficult to accept that less competition will be good for customers anywhere. I also think that the FTC should force the cable companies to allow customers to connect to the network without a STB (common practice in Europe).

Sincerely

Ron Collins