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Because my father has been seriously ill, I've had to spend a lot of time in Albemarle County Virginia. My parents have Comcast service for telephone, television and internet. For reasons too lengthy to explain in this space, Comcast is their only option. And, just like many others, I could go on even further about the atrocious service and continuous outages with Comcast service (where no adjustments are made to reimburse for the services that were not delivered).

But, this is a place to discuss net neutrality issues, and the other day something struck me as being particularly significant in the net neutrality debate: Comcast is already showing its allegiance to paid "vendors" and its ability to control customer's access and what data they receive. They just do it with television service, where they currently have greater control - and in a covert and peculiar way. I'll explain: My parents have the most extensive digital television package on two of their televisions. That includes the ability to record shows ("DVR") and to see a detailed onscreen programming guide ("the Guide") for present and future broadcasts on all channels (the ones they actually get, as well as the ones they don't).

To DVR a show, you have to pick that show from the Guide and set it to record at that future time. You can set a program to record only one time, or you can set it to record as a series, so that it is recorded every time that it airs without the need for additional input. There are several other details that you can choose about how that show will be recorded and/or saved. But, the Guide's accuracy is vital for two reasons: (1) you have to use the Guide's future schedule to be able to set a recording for the only time or the first time in a series, and (2) the DVR system relies on the Guide's titling to match up the recording "setting" with the actual airing of the program.

About twice a month, in recent months, the Guide has malfunctioned. The time slots for most of the channels will read "To Be Announced." Sometimes this malfunction lasts a day. Sometimes, it lasts a week. But, if you have a show set to record that currently reads "To Be Announced," it won't record. The DVR doesn't have anything called "To Be Announced" in its system, and its system is trying to match the Guide. The list of scheduled items will be blank for that day, even if you actually have a program that is going to air. The episode will be lost from the hard drive. (Also, if you are just trying to see what is on at any given time, you are totally out of luck - channel surfing is your only friend.)

Since this malfunction in the Guide started happening more and more frequently, I noticed something significant: the "premium channels," (for which Comcast receives individual, extra money from its customers - over and above the "package" of channels), were immune to the "To Be Announced" reiteration. Those extra cost premium channels always had the actual programming in the time slots of the Guide. Hundreds of other channels will read "To Be Announced" in every time slot, as far into the future as the Guide will go; however, those added cost channels Comcast were spared the malfunction.

It seemed indicative of how Comcast would treat any "vendor" (for lack of a better word) in its universe: increase Comcast's bottom line and see uninterrupted service. As for its customers: pay lots, get more - pay less, get nothing.

Again, when no one is looking, Comcast makes clear where its allegiances lie and how it will use its market power to control what material and services its customers get. It doesn't matter what they say they "will" do, because truth be told, they are already showing you how they play.

Thank you.