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Currently Cable Companies and Video Service Providers operate using a model similar to the old Big Bells where they refuse to sell or allow compatible equipment that they neither produce nor own exclusive rights to. The ability to work with commercially available equipment was shown in the case of AT&T and extends most recently to cable modems.

The average customer pays a rental fee varying from \$5 to \$15 a month for rental of the boxes that allow receipt of the video signal. Given a minimum of 2 TVs on average in each American household this equates to \$120 to \$180 per year before taxes, fees and other costs.

More important than the cost is the drag on technological innovation. Cable Companies feel beholden to receive these monthly rental fees as well as fees from guide developers for placement of channels within their system. They have no vested interest in innovation until they know it will be monetized.

My personal experience with my video provider switching to digital service was that they required rental of a "converter" for \$2 a month, but I needed to pay \$15 a month for an HD set top box with a guide. This is ridiculous as all 6 TVs in my home have digital tuners. Almost all TVs have them since the FCC required broadcast networks to convert to digital. So, I have 5 TVs with digital converters, capable of playing video in multiple formats and built-in support for a guide but am required to rent a box from my video provider so they can assure they control their signal? Maybe they fear I might receive a video feed for personal use on too many TVs and wouldn't know it unless they had 100% control of the feed I pay for.

Whatever the reason, not allowing me to use the industry standard equipment I paid for with my TV or buy with a commercially available set top box is ludicrous. I have a Tivo with lifetime guide support and am still required to rent a separate card to get all my channels. Oh, and the extra features (on-demand, auto HD tuning) don't work because the cards "aren't that advanced."

Cable Companies and Video Providers are allowed near monopolistic access to areas and use this exclusivity to bleed customers and fatten their profits while government at all levels protects them.