

It's always entertaining to read the stories provided by National Cable & Telecommunications Association and their members such as Time Warner Cable as to the failure of the CableCARD approach.

What they always leave out is that consumer was argued with, told lies and had to fight to get a cableCARD. Back in 2005, I went through that with Time Warner. The people on the ground (installers and service techs) were very nice but had no training in how to get a cableCARD to work. The people in the office would tell customers that "isn't what you want."

Things were a little better in 2008 when I got cableCARDS for a digital cable tv ready Vista Computer. Since the cable companies had to use cableCARDS themselves, at least they knew how to pair and work the cards now. But by that time almost all major TV set makers had withdrawn models with cableCARDS. As a JVC engineer told me when I was trying to troubleshoot a problem, "we're not going to do cableCARD anymore, we can't get the information we need to make it work properly."

So now the NCTA has found new things to blame for their own short comings. And with the introduction of Tuning Adapters, we're once again in an area where the companies are not training their service personnel as in the case of a problem I have right now, I'm providing them with more information than they have themselves. (And it seems that SDV just doesn't work for Time Warner unless you use their set top box. Perhaps the IP solution would give us a chance to make it work properly.)

I think the only solution to this problem is to handle the NCTA and it's member companies the same way the telephone company was handled. Remove all equipment from their control. They can provide a signal and tv sets or recorders will be enabled with a security device to allow them to work. Once the NCTA is out of the set top box business, we'll finally see true innovation and choice, but if left in control we'll be like the 1950 telephone company complete with rotary dials. Until the profit motivation is removed from their control, we won't see any improvement in service.

As for branding, I hate to break this to the cable companies, but they're largely unknown. Just as most people refer to their network television station only by channel number when talking to a friend by long distance and have no idea that NBC isn't on channel 4 everywhere. Branding is only a concern for the cable company marketing department, not for the public.

Finally, why is it ok to discriminate against us because there are only 500,000 cableCARDS out there? We want the same services as the rest, discrimination shouldn't be allowed in this field or any other.

