

The lack of compatibility among the networks hurts consumers in several ways. Not only is there a big possibility that smaller carriers will simply cease to exist because they can't compete with cutting edge devices. But it will also limit which devices even get 4G LTE capability. While consumers may already be used to choosing a cell phone based on which carrier offers it, they are far less likely to lock themselves into a carrier when buying a digital camera or any other consumer electronic device or connected appliance. Imagine if you had to buy a new TV simply because you wanted to switch cable providers. That sounds nuts, right? And there are many people, including retailers, such as Best Buy former CEO Brian Dunn who think that what carriers have been doing in terms of locking devices particular networks is bad for the growth of the entire consumer electronics business. At the Mobile World Congress trade show in Barcelona in February, he called on retailers to open their devices and allow them freely roam on other wireless networks. He said this would greatly reduce the price of products and would spur more adoption of connected-devices..

"This inefficient supply chain is driving costs up instead of down," he said.

Unfortunately even if the FCC seeks to harmonize the 700 MHz band carriers can still lock their devices into working only on their network.

I hope that the FCC eventually addresses this issue, but I wouldn't hold my breath expecting things to change much anytime soon. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of having two major wireless carriers serving most of the customers in the U.S. market is that they have a lot of power. And they can use that power to dictate how spectrum is used as well as influence which specifications suppliers build for. And if they want to keep customers locked into their networks via the devices, they can do that.