

CUSTOMER SERVICE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

5/8/07

Time Warner Cable did not answer some questions put to it by the Cable Advisory Board. This report is therefore based partly on customer telephone calls, emails and letters sent to the Citizen Information Center.

TWC's introduction of Navigator DVR software in the fall of 2006 resulted in many customer complaints to TWC. Customers seem unanimous in characterizing the replaced Passport software as superior to the new Navigator, and many commented unfavorably on the irony of TWC raising rates and reducing service.

Moreover, technical problems caused a large number of customers to experience interruptions in service in which their TWC equipment froze, resulting in a dark screen. Calls to TWC instructed customers to reboot their boxes by unplugging, which would temporarily restore service. Some customers had to reboot several times daily and several mentioned the inconvenience of moving heavy furniture.

Many other Navigator problems were encountered – and continue to this day – which apparently overtaxed TWC customer service staff. Many customers reported long telephone waits to speak to customer service representatives, then receiving only the advice to reboot. Further long waits were required to reach technical staff.

Appointments to switch boxes were so distant – up to two weeks – that many customers brought their boxes to TWC. Different boxes did not always result in improved service.

Some customers became so frustrated they began writing letters to the newspaper and contacting city government, demanding TWC either return to Passport or fix Navigator. Many wondered why Lincoln had no competing cable company.

The customer service subcommittee identified four areas in which TWC customer service could be improved:

- 1) Customers deserve dependable cable service, and should be compensated if they do not get it.

It does customers no good to have sound and picture coming into their homes if TWC equipment prevents customers from viewing programs. Each time Navigator software freezes or needs to be rebooted, this is an interruption in cable service.

RECOMMENDATION: In the absence of any way of determining whose service was disrupted and how much, TWC must rebate all digital, DVR and HD customers. The subcommittee recommends each customer's rebate begin when Navigator was downloaded to his/her household and run to May 31. The amount rebated should be half of the charge for digital, DVR and HD service.

- 2) Customers need to know how to complain, what to expect and where to appeal.

Attached are customer service home pages from TWC sites in Nebraska and New York & New Jersey. The word "complaint" does not appear on the Nebraska page, yet the other site begins by explaining the complaint process.

RECOMMENDATION: That TWC redesign its customer service home page to resemble the New York & New Jersey page with a clear explanation of the complaint process here. TWC should inform customers of this change and monthly bills should henceforth refer to this process.

- 3) Customers deserve prompt and effective response to their complaints, and the city must be able to monitor that this is being accomplished.

Under the franchise, TWC is obliged to report every six months on written complaints to the city. This leaves the city unable to track the volume of telephone and email complaints. This was also a problem for the subcommittee because it could establish no base line of complaints to compare the last nine months to.

RECOMMENDATION: That TWC report to the city on telephone, email and mailed complaints and the company's responses. Each complaint needs to be tagged "resolved" or "unresolved." These reports should be made every three months instead of six as now.

- 4) Companies and customers both benefit from good communications. When TWC realized it had technical and customer education issues with Navigator, it should have exploited the power of television better. Too many customers disregard the paper included in billings as junk mail.

RECOMMENDATION: Channel 100 and "Answers on Demand" are a start, but TWC should invest more time and effort here. The subcommittee recommends TWC create, promote and repeat a live studio program to answer customer questions. This would lead to improved customer understanding and hopefully better relationships.

(signed) Stuart Long, Jim Johnson, Donna Behlen, Scott Young