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My Experiences of field service work in the Orana region of NSW.

My profile

I am Electronics and Communications Certificate Service Technician with 35 years field experience working in a vast variety of situations covering the Orana region. I pride myself on my technical skill, my amicable attitude, and my tenacity in solving problems. I operate on low overheads and so have very reasonable labour rates. During that time I have worked with all the Telcos and some of their customers. I have seen a lot happen with the advantage of understanding the technologies involved and so have been able to see through the bulldust that is regularly dished out. I have SO many bad stories.

Issues

The major issues I see are the low grade products on offer, the exorbitant pricing structures, the deceitful conduct in sales and service, and little prospect of a better future in the short term.

I am used to climbing on top of my van to get coverage and I know all the hills around the region where I will get my sms messages. It is exasperating that city based management centres chastise me for being out of range so often.

Telstra (known as Bloody Telstra)

I charge a \$25 per hour premium to deal with Telstra and Bigpond problems due to the grief that is usually involved.

Why a wholesaler should not be a retailer.

Telstra does have the best network in rural areas and they use that as leverage to get and keep retail customers. I have had many customers that could not get connected or could not get service unless it was as a Telstra customer despite their desire to sign up with another Telco offering better service and/or pricing.

Deceitful sales conduct.

In todays rapidly changing world, a binding 24 month contract is severe restriction. I advise customers that reputable Telcos offer short term contracts and rely on customer loyalty based on service and value. I advise that any Telco pushing 24 month contracts is not to be trusted.

Exploiting naivety

When you see someone signed up a 24 month 300MB per month contract and they don't understand the limitations, you know that the salesman was exploiting the situation.

Expense of Loyalty.

Why is it that Aldi prepaid customers had unlimited access to the Telstra Network for \$35/month inc GST, and loyal Telstra customers pay a multiple of that for a limited service? The plan has recently changed, but is till very attractive.

Capacity

There are a lot of 3G and 4G devices being sold and while they connect to the networks OK, there are many complaints relating to speed. When I run diagnostics it is apparent that there are substantial bottlenecks in the local networks. A local resident with latency issues was told that it was because of his location in a valley. He spent a lot of money installing a 22m tower and a fringe reception antenna with no avail. I was able to show that the issue was latency in the network immediately after the first connection point. My assessment is that the network is full and that his substantial expenses were unwarranted.

Current Technology

I have been reliably informed that the hardware at exchanges is old and not capable of supplying Internet services that are required such as static IP addressing. An organisation now has a requirement for a static IP address and has been trying to get it from Bigpond for 6 months. The variety of excuses given is astounding. After 2 weeks of trying even I gave up. I was then informed by another Technician that he is experiencing the same problem in many regional areas. Other ISPs can provide it but the customer is locked in a long term contract.

Deceitful service conduct

When dealing with Telstra, and Bigpond, getting the employee number makes a substantial difference to the service received. I have had to repeatedly log calls before a resolution is found before I started recording employee numbers.

I do significant diagnostics on the customers systems before logging a call. I regularly have to disagree with the intended actions of the support staff.

If equipment is out of warranty it is deemed to be faulty and the need for a new item is advised. I have spare tested equipment that I can use to confirm that the fault is not in the customers equipment. They don't like it when I can prove it is not a hardware fault at the customers end.

The support staff are using a remote log in to diagnose the problem, even when this is not required. They are then browsing the computer and attempting to sell expensive software. I have had to remind them that what they are doing is very questionable and unacceptable.

I have had situations where the "faults" are very questionable and a costly solution is offered that really isn't related to the problem. The problem is not resolved until I advise that another Telco can provide the service reliably without the added costs.

Many times I have called and the problem goes away while on the phone, despite the problem having been present for some time. There is a denial that there ever was a problem. I could argue the point but it will be to no avail.

I wonder how many other people are being exploited due to their naivety and lack of independent technical support.

NBN (soon to be known as Bloody NBN)

Plenty of money.

I have heard several times that NBN staff have “open chequebooks” and I saw this recently when a NBN worker booked into a motel and took the large family room with spa even though a much lower cost single room was available.

Satellite comparison

I have heard that there was only 49,000 connections available and these filled up in October 2013. So any body now wanting a satellite connection will have to wait.

Compare O3B with NBN...

A press release about O3B...

<http://www.itnews.com.au/News/335433,fibre-like-satellite-broadband-promised-to-australia.aspx>

O3B have a base-station of 3 dishes for a total of \$2M at an existing facility in Dubbo:
http://www.dubbo.nsw.gov.au/blog/Media_releases/post/Business_proposes_to_supply_services_from_Dubbo_to_world%27s_most_isolated/

The facility services the Australasia region...

<http://orbitrax.com/?p=4801>

NBN Co spends \$180m on 10 satellite ground stations:

<http://www.zdnet.com/au/nbn-co-picks-three-more-sites-for-satellite-stations-7000005067/>

That's \$18M each. The NBN certainly have plenty of money to waste!

Also note the O3B solution will be quicker.

A similar comparison of the satellite costs has many in the industry shaking their heads.

Hiring Telstra Staff

It is well known that the NBN headhunted many Telstra staff offering substantial extra wages and then had them sitting around doing nothing. Apart from the costs, the concern I have in the bureaucratic, uncaring culture of Telstra being implanted into the NBN and I believe that we are seeing the start of it now.

Recent examples in Dubbo.

1. A retailer on the edge of Dubbo could not get ADSL, however 2 adjoining retailers, including a competitor, have reliable ADSL. The modern retailing management systems now require high speed Internet access. He is in range of several NBN wireless towers but could get a connection because fibre is to be installed sometime in the distant future. It is only after extensive lobbying, and an approach to the NBN legal department, that approval for a wireless connection was given.

2 A home businessman on the edge of Dubbo cannot get ADSL and due to the local geography even has trouble getting 3G service. The business is very dependant on high speed Internet and he applied to get an NBN wireless connection. Despite being in a clear line of sight to 2 NBN towers, he was connected to an out of sight tower with low signal

strength because of allocation maps drawn without consideration of the local terrain. When it was being installed I raised concerns to the installer regarding reliability especially during wet weather due to the reflective characteristics of leaves on the numerous large Ironbark trees. I was told that the allocation map was to be adhered to. My concerns have been proven and now no-one wants to resolve it.

There are other stories as well.

Solutions

Put a big broom through the NBN before it is too late.

Set up a body, with teeth, that customers can go to get Telco problems resolved in a timely fashion.

Put in working solutions now to meet the immediate access needs of customers. The NBN is a long way off and is shaping up to be not as good as it is supposed to be.

There are low cost point to point WiFi products that have ranges of up to 40kms that could easily solve the Communications needs of rural customers that cannot be used due to restrictive regulations. Eg <http://www.ubiquitishop.com.au/>

Change the restrictive regulations.

Put in a level playing field for the smaller ISPs and Telcos. They generally provide much better service but are being restricted by questionable conduct by the “big boys”.