

qualitalk

Information on Technology and Society

July 2011

Internet Version

ISSN 1615 9667

12. Volume

41. Edition

Printed Version

ISSN 1435 1641

16. Volume

57. Edition

Customers' Service and Customers' Care were virtually unknown in times when the telephone rotary dial was used. Only the volume of the ring tone could be modified and the device was tightly bound by a cord of three meters, or six meters for an extra charge. Nowadays, a user is rather befuddled when trying to understand today's complex telecommunication services, and the giant Deutsche Telekom with its grid monopoly leaves the customers to their own devices.

Oliver Schuster

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Those were the days ...

You should not use the telephone with rotary dial nowadays because the procedure may harm the equipment.



A Desert called Customers' Service Deutsche Telekom

In the seventies when satellite television started a whole new world was brought into the West German living room. In addition to the two public TV channels financed through user fees, private TV enterprises started to sprout, often offering programs of frivolous content. Also, some channels specialized in non stop marketing of consumer products giving the old fashioned mail catalogue a run for its money.

woman in her apron, to see what was happening in the street. They were immortalized in characters such as »Adolf Tegtmeier«, created by Jürgen von Manger, who commented on God and the world in his slightly standardized dialect of the Ruhr mining region. Another one was »Else Stratmann«, the butcher's quick witted wife from the little non descriptive town of Wanne Eickel. Both »Adolf Tegtmeier« and »Else Stratmann« didn't need TV or an antenna but still had the best reception.

Phasing Out Analogue Satellite TV

But when it was no longer people looking out of windows but satellite dishes the way of looking at things also had changed: TV was the new window to the world. From the beginning satellite reception was equipped for analogue reception. However by April 30th of 2012 all transmission will have switched over from analogue to digital. One estimates that one third of all satellite TV receivers are still analogue ones. If not updated in due time users will wind up staring at a dark screen, because in order to receive digital signals different equipment is needed; ideally a digital enabled monitor should be installed.

Very cleverly German Telekom started to market their newest product during this transitional phase: ENTERTAIN. Recently the door bell rang. Unexpectedly it was a Telekom employee who inquired



The ENTERTAIN Program Guide shows up perfectly on the old fashioned CRT manufactured by Metz, a German company with a 70 years tradition. Necessary hardware on top of the CRT: upper left the media receiver, upper right Speedport Bridge.

Migrant workers finally could watch on TV their local teams play, thanks to the satellite dish.

In olden times, »Fern Sehen« »Tele Vision« »Looking at some thing at a distance« consisted of people looking out of the window, the man in his undershirt, the

the degree of satisfaction with phone and internet services. Very smoothly the than offered a new faster internet connection VDSL25000 bundled with an internet based TV service... all this for almost nothing: only 38,95 € for a two months trial period. This offer was called *Try&Buy*.

This looked very impressive and the Telekom employee leaving his direct phone number for inquire and hand written explanations regarding the set up of *Try&Buy*, contributed to a favorable impression of a customer oriented enterprise. Only later it transpired that the German Telekom had outsourced this particular marketing operation to another company who's employees purportedly did not have in depth technical knowledge of the new system.

First, lots of small print; than, no service to speak of

Confirmation of the order arrived the following day. Attached to it came nine pages of small print with innumerable notes the rights of German Telekom and responsibilities of the customer. Also, for the first time were revealed the costs of this service after the two months *Try&Buy* period. The ENTERTAIN monthly service fee increases by 23 percent; for hardware, i. e. the basis router and the media receiver and the bridge router for TV reception one has to pay a monthly rental fee. Figuring all the costs for the two years of the contract one arrives at monthly fee of 68,59 €.

The new high speed internet connection was scheduled four weeks after order confirmation. Because this would have created a conflict with the schedule of the customer, a two week extension was obtained, for 2nd of May 2011. That same day the internet connection was interrupted without forewarning, a very unpleasant surprise. After several phone calls to German Telekom it transpired that without any customer notification the internet connection was switched to a high speed one around 11 o'clock. That the necessary hardware had not yet arrived didn't seem to concern Telekom at all. In the following days several packages with hardware arrived, some of them in duplicate but the router for internet access did not show up. What that meant that for closed to two weeks the internet could not be accessed: no e mail, no on line banking transaction, etc. Despite many time consuming phone call to people at Telekom's service points, hot lines, customer service and technical service the problem could not be solved. Switching back to the previous slower transmission speed was technically not possible, so they said. Yes, the necessary router is on its way, but to be sure another shipment will be made, so they said. Already very upset the client demanded a free of charge installation of the whole system should be done by a Telekom technician, to ensure smooth functioning of the new system with computer, internet radio and Telekom media receiver.

Finally the new router Speedport W723V arrived, twelve days after the switch to high speed. Two days



The modern Magic Wand:
If one needs to leave the room to get a six pack one can stop the program and pick it up later thanks to a recording to a built in hard disk.

after the router's arrival a technician showed up to install the system. In view of the very unpleasant experience with the installation process and the relatively high

only in boiler plate replies such as: »We have cancelled your service in interruption report as requested« or »Your problem has been taken care of and eliminated. Your service inter

about problems with WiFi with the new system the reply was that Telekom cannot be responsible for functioning of attached equipment by other manufacturers. It would therefore not make any sense to send a Telekom service technician. This gives the impression Telekom does not realize that it is not just the process of data transmission but the successful reception of such data which provides the user with value.

Apparently when it comes to offering this new ENTERTAIN service package Telekom puts most of their effort into marketing but neglected the rest. For example on the help you can read: »MY PROFILE: you can use different offers of your MediaCenter such as e mails, photos, music, videos and other options directly on your TV screen. For this you have to activate one time only your MediaCenter and its files i. g. photos . You can access the Media Center under www.telekom.de/mediacenter.«

Over half of the 191 TV channels available have to be subscribed separately. It looks like Telekom wants to break in additional moneys by promoting for fee TV channels, ebay access, video downloads etcetera. Foreign channels such as *RAI uno*, *RAI due*, *RAI tre*, also at extra cost may be of interest of people of the respected countries. But international news channels such as *Al Jazeera* and *NHK TV Japan* in English are unavailable not even for an extra fee. One has to take the moniker ENTERTAIN literally: It is entertainment that is offered not information.



ENTERTAIN includes internet based radio reception.

One can listen to news from Japan without additional charge. But Asian TV channels are completely absent from the program.

monthly fee after the initial two months trial period there was no incentive to stay on with the new system for a two year contract. Continually unstable WiFi connections to computer iPod Touch and internet radio Lenco brand added to the frustration.

Arrogance and Ignorance

A complaint addressed to the director of Telekom's customer service, Ralf Hoßbach, and sent via snail mail could not elicit a response. Questions and service interruption reports via e mail resulted

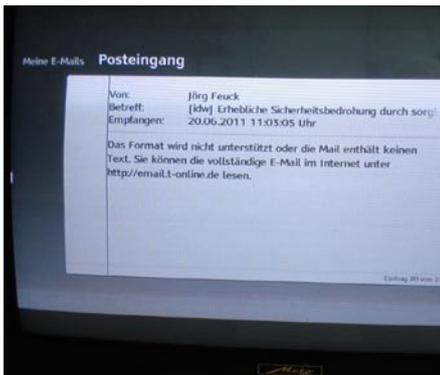
ruption report has been closed.« When in fact neither the user has cancelled service reports nor Telekom had taken care of service problems. The user, utterly confused, then turns to user forums installed by Telekom, where he can share his grief with equally upset other users. The multitude of listed complaints are not infrequently sprinkled with expletives. Telekom experts do their best to come up with solutions which in their complexity would require IT diploma to understand.

Only one time was it possible to reach a technical expert over the phone. But even that led to disappointment. When complaining



html Format not supported...

if one wishes to read a html format on the TV monitor, the following text appears: »The format is not supported or the e mail contains no text. You may be able to read the complete e mail under <http://email.t> online



Timothy John Berners-Lee is the one who created 20 years ago Hypertext Markup Language html without which the World Wide Web www would not exist. And now the innovative ! German Telekom brings a product on the market which can not offer this standard.

MediaCenter without added value

The additional services listed under MY PROFILE are not up to the standard of one's own APPLE computer. For example displaying e mails in the html Code is not possible. Only a few lines fit the TV screen then one has to scroll down. Listed links do not functioned, at tachmentts cannot be opened. Not even your monthly telekom bill can be displayed at the TV screen. One once getting over with the night mare and cancel Try&Buy and return the equipment as fast as possible.

However the RMA papers re turn material authorisation doc umentation are valued only for three weeks after delivery date, for example if the shipment ar rived damaged. They are not valid it one wants to opt out com pletely of the Try&Buy phase of two months. In order to accom plish that one has to contact Tel ekom to receive a new package unit and return authorisation.

Question of efficiency: Would it not more efficient to advice

the customer to keep the pack age material and at return docu ments in the original shipment, just in case the costumer to dis continue the Try&Buy period? The suspicion arises that has the cus tomer not inquired the »correct« way of returning the package but send it back the original package, could it have been that package would have been lost within Tele kom's the Byzantine bureaucracy? Could the costumer than has been stocked with a two year contract?

If one still wants to use the new high speed VDSL25000 proto col just for one's internet access an other form has to be filled out: Special change over »ENTERTAIN Try&Buy« which however can only be had at the Telekom brick and mortar store. One sugges tion: ask the clerk to fax the filled out form directly to the appropri ate Telekom department wher ever that may be. The whole pro cedure reminds one of processes aptly described in Kafka's works.

After disconnecting all hardware but he router problems with the in ternet connection still continue.

Online instructions written in heavily technical terminology did not help. Occasionally terms for one and the same thing are changed without forewarning. For example the router I.D. is called in online instruction *Pre Shared Key* while on the router itself W723V it shows as nun »WLAN Schlüssel WLAN key«. Confusing, isn't it?

A brake on HiTech Innovations

The pioneer phase of internet is behind us. Now the main task of service providers such as Telekom should be to exert every effort to make this new media accessible to more strata of society. Unfortunately Telekom's attitude achieves the opposite. The more demanding, sophisticated customers who purchased the product ENTERTAIN more for its higher internet access speed



“Someone calling themselves a customer says they want something called service.”

are left high and dry, resulting in disappointment. They have to find out on their own how to make the new faster internet access work. This trial and error process becomes tedious after while and may well discourage users to accept future Telekom's innovations. Telekom does not realize that it is precisely this group of customers that drives service providers to more and more innovations. They demand higher and higher data transmission speed and easier and more efficient access to data in the public and private sector. More transparency would benefit both sides, user

and data provider. The possibilities are endless: area planning, details of use of tax moneys, local area and global logistics ... To give a concrete example: Recently Great Britain's information system »data.gov.org« started to list online all government expenses above 25000 with monthly updates.

One cannot help but think that German Telekom AG and GmbH has installed their internet user forums to keep a buffer between themselves and the users that access to internet forums when the connection is interrupted has not come to Telekom's mind! But should one ask for the dispatch of a technician Telekom does its best to discourage such requests pointing out, without going into details, the high cost and the uncertain outcome of such service.

If customers in the USA feel short changed by providers of goods and services they can turn to a customer's right attorney to sue for damages. It would be nice to have something similar in our country as well; at the very least it would prod Telekom to change its attitude ☐

Impressum



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July 2011
published four times a year
ISSN 1615 9667 Internet
ISSN 1435 1641 printed edition

Pictures by the author

German English Translation:
Dr. Dieter von Jettmar, Fort Worth TX

qualitalk will be forwarded to registered readers by e mail and can be downloaded from the internet via
www.chris-schuth.de/qtalk_57_en.pdf

Readers not connected to the internet get the publication by snail mail.

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