

Are You Smarter Than an AOL User?

To meet customer expectations, multifamily broadband providers must be able to troubleshoot a variety of problems that may be unrelated to broadband.

By Bryan J. Rader / *UpStream Network*

As the residential broadband industry continues to evolve, service providers might think their customer bases aren't keeping up with all the changes and product evolutions in the market.

Yes, some residents still ask, "How many MIPS do I get?" Others say, "I've had Yahoo as my internet provider for years." Keeping up with real technology advances can be hard in a fast-moving space.

But not all residents are playing catch-up. Many, regardless of age, are advancing their broadband knowledge at a breakneck pace. They're talking about ping levels and asking sophisticated questions such as "Is this symmetrical?" or "What kind of latency should I expect?"

Huh? What happened to Yahoo being the ISP? Or "MIPS" being the speed level?

SMARTER CUSTOMERS, SMARTER PROVIDERS

Many residents are starting to sound like Stanford computer science grads with job offers from Google or Slack. This trend is happening across all types of multifamily communities – and it's not limited to the most affluent high-rise buildings in urban markets. It's happening in senior living facilities, middle-income apartment buildings and, of course, student housing.

The smarter customers get, the smarter multifamily broadband providers must become. "Are you smarter than a fifth grader?" has been replaced with "Are you smarter than an AOL user?" The stakes are getting higher and customers expect more.

For the past two decades, the multifamily broadband industry has built help desks to support its internet customers. In the early days, I remember some of the assistance offered by help-desk specialists: "Well, is your computer plugged in?" "Do you see a blinking green light?" "Why don't you just turn it off and turn it back on?"

That was the answer for everything: Shut it down. Start it back up. "No luck? OK, I guess we'll have to send a technician."

But today's customers have become much more savvy – and much more demanding. They expect help-desk specialists

to provide much more support than a simple instruction to plug a cord into an electrical outlet.

This is putting new pressure on help desks across the industry.

EXPANDING AREAS OF EXPERTISE

I recently visited an UpStream Network internet customer in her Florida home. She had spoken to the help desk over the weekend about a Netflix streaming problem: Her iPad was not streaming properly in the back bedroom. When she called UpStream for help, she wanted the specialist to see her device, troubleshoot it while she was on the phone and solve the problem. She wanted us to see everything she saw and know exactly what devices she was using.

This is the new challenge. This customer had iPads, smartphones, computers, wireless printers, smart TVs and other devices all connected to UpStream's network. As an industry, providers must be prepared to solve a whole host of problems beyond broadband or help desks won't be any "help" much longer.

I'm not saying every resident today learned how to write code, or created a tricked-out wireless hub station at home. But an increasing percentage of customers have become experts in the broadband industry's products and services over the past several years.

Multifamily broadband providers need to prepare by hiring more experienced help-desk staff and training employees to handle more difficult situations. The better equipped they are, the better they will be able to satisfy this new, experienced, tech-savvy internet subscriber.

Broadband providers can keep telling customers to flick the power switch off and on, but if they don't expand their help-desk services, eventually they will be flicking off the lights, too. ❖

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