

Making Big, Once-in-a-Decade Decisions Is Tough

MDU owners should conduct careful research before entering into new contracts with broadband service providers.

By Bryan J. Rader / *UpStream Network*

We recently went shopping for a new washer-dryer set – something people do only once every 10 years or so (kind of like an MDU owner choosing a new service provider).

We looked at the obvious brand names: Maytag, Whirlpool, LG, GE. We tried to figure out which ones were right for our family: front-load, top-load, agitator, high-efficiency. It became an entire Saturday of research and product analysis, which included dozens of websites, three national retailers’ opinions and ratings, a return-on-investment analysis at various price points (e.g., how important is it to have the quietest washer?).

It’s amazing how the washer-dryer industry captures so much attention from its potential customers for a once-in-a-decade purchase. There were more product reviews than we could imagine.

The new features since we explored this purchase a decade ago are impressive. The washer now “talks” to the dryer so the dryer “knows” what type of clothes it will be drying. The washer uses Wi-Fi to send updates on the completion of each wash cycle. But now I’m worried that there are machines getting too smart for their own good: “Hey, you, I found another \$20 bill in your shorts. Third one I washed this month. I’m drying this one out and opening a savings account.”

Great! Now the washer and dryer are doing a return-on-investment analysis on my family!

As we read through all the product reviews and recommendations, we became even more confused about what we needed. This process was probably like the once-in-a-decade research apartment owners go through when selecting their next internet and TV provider.

UNDERSTANDING BANDWIDTH OPTIONS

I’m sure homeowners think, “Wow, my clothes don’t smell as fresh anymore, time to look at new appliances.” MDU owners have the same line of thinking: “Wow, that 50 Mbps internet product may not be so good anymore for my residents. Maybe I should consider a replacement.” Well, there goes their

Saturday, lost to immersion in reviews, recommendations and ratings.

To determine what internet providers you like, start going through the list of potential features: What speed? Is symmetrical important? How about managed Wi-Fi? What about smart-home applications to be included? Fiber? Gigabit? Common-area coverage?

The one thing we learned about our washer-dryer research experience is that it focuses you on learning a lot about your family’s specific needs. Kids, pets and baseball uniforms to wash all impact the type of machines you buy. It’s the same with property owners selecting their next ISP. Know your specific needs – not everyone needs the 7.8 cubic-foot dryer, or gigabit-speed internet.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Reading the reviews of washers and dryers was helpful yet also confusing. It’s the same with property owners. How do providers handle response times? What about construction timelines? What are resident experiences like? And how good is a 4.3 rating?

Online forums from other shoppers can help too. Comments are left about the noise, the cycle timing, the options. MDU owners would love this too: Comments might be left about response cycle, pricing, on-time delivery.

At the end of this purchase process, I realized how much research and analysis and word-of-mouth matters in this infrequent buying decision. It’s the same with MDU owners attempting to get the right products and providers for their customer bases.

“I’ve gotta get the 50 Mbps guy out of here quickly” is a theme that leads to a deep-dive analysis of the internet options. Smart owners are comprehensive in their product research – just as my family was with our appliances. ❖

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