

Unnecessary Support Calls Drive Up Costs for ISPs

As broadband service speeds increase, so do connectivity issues and subscriber complaints.

By Jason Moore / *RouteThis*

Let's start with some good news. Over the last two years, upstream data speeds rose 51 percent, and downstream speeds increased 125 percent. Sounds great, right? But would knowing that service calls to ISPs are at record levels – and that the top complaint from customers is that connection speeds are too slow – affect that opinion?

The recurring message as more ISP providers switch to fiber is that infrastructure is vital, and speeds are fantastic. Still, the realities of subscribers' home environments and the lack of customer education on Wi-Fi ultimately result in increased support calls and complaints.

Technically speaking, ISPs are well within their rights to tell their customers, "Sorry, it's not my problem." But it quickly becomes their

problem when subscribers start writing one-star reviews and switching to other providers out of frustration. Though the issues might not be the fault of an ISP, helping customers is in the best interest of service providers.

DIGGING INTO THE DATA

RouteThis recently looked at the ISP support experience, pulling data from more than 3,000 internet service providers worldwide to pinpoint the choke points for data.

One of the more staggering data points is that as much as 50 percent of overall support engagements can be traced back to problems with home Wi-Fi setups. Whether that translates into truck rolls or the time a support team spends on troubleshooting calls, this is a significant issue for ISPs.

The RouteThis data showed that an increased number of devices added to the household and device upgrades also strain home Wi-Fi environments and contribute to poor subscriber experiences. North American home networks boast the highest median number of devices (nine), increasing the chances that at least one will suffer from a poor connection.

CPE SUPPORT ISN'T THE ANSWER

RouteThis has encountered many ISPs that think that the solution to their support issues is on-premises hardware or CPE. Though that might seem like a good idea, the reality is that the growing diversity in CPE hardware

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creates conflict and undermines an ISP's ability to get consistent visibility into subscriber households. This leads to long handle times, improper resolutions, repeat calls, escalations and unnecessary truck rolls.

CPE diversity – even completely ignoring firmware – is a challenge regardless of the population of an ISP's base, and this challenge grows as the subscriber count increases. Within the RouteThis research data set for this report, the number of unique make-and-model combinations ranged from 103 (smaller ISPs) to 363 (larger ISPs).

It's increasingly clear that the combination of consumer-provided CPEs, subscriber reluctance to upgrade or update equipment, and regular changes in preferred CPE suppliers means that universal customer care diagnostics will *not* come from CPEs.

EMBRACING DIAGNOSTIC (AND AGNOSTIC) TECHNOLOGY

The RouteThis research might leave some ISPs wondering how they can overcome these support-related hurdles, but there are a few recommended

tactics. First, be more proactive in educating subscribers. From an education standpoint, this can take the form of easy-to-follow videos giving step-by-step instructions on how to rectify problems or a set of PDFs that guide people through every step of their network configurations. ISPs can also empower tech-savvy subscribers with self-help solutions to manage their troubleshooting so they can avoid a tech support call or visit.

In addition, ISPs that embrace digital diagnostic tools for their tech support teams will be able to bypass those unnecessary Wi-Fi support calls. Ideally, tools such as these will

work with any home network. This will allow ISPs to spend time on more pressing issues relevant to the broadband network. When it comes to the point of CPE fragmentation, ISPs would be wise to implement a software-based, CPE-agnostic solution – in other words, a solution that works no matter what CPE hardware subscribers are using.

Taking a more proactive approach to Wi-Fi management and efficient diagnostics capabilities will slash ISP support costs, reduce churn, and improve subscriber satisfaction. It may even transform the traditional ISP-subscriber support relationship as we know it. ❖



Jason Moore is CEO of RouteThis, a Wi-Fi in-home connectivity platform provider transforming how internet service providers and smart-home brands deploy, manage and support connected homes. The company's platform is used in Europe, North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.