

# Turn The BBBs into AAAs

Why not do same-day installs?  
The scheduling technology exists.

By Bryan Rader ■ *DirecPath*

It should be no surprise that cable TV and satellite companies generate some of the highest levels of complaints to the better business bureaus (BBBs). In 2005 alone, there were over 8,000 individual complaints for the cable and dish guys, putting this industry at number 17 out of 3,000 industries surveyed by the Council of Better Business Bureaus.

The BBB complaints cover items that range from customer service, to rates and pricing, to reception quality according to a recent *Wall Street Journal* report. It's no shock that "service" is a prime concern.

In an era where you can guarantee a package will be halfway across the world by 8 am tomorrow, and you can order holiday gifts for sure delivery over the Internet for 50 family members, lack of service responsiveness should no longer be the norm for the cable TV industry.

Long hold times, ridiculously long appointment windows. "The tech should arrive sometime between sunrise and sunset" seems to be the normal mantra. Several years ago, cable companies thought that the "AM" and "PM" appointment times would suffice for an industry known to "dissatisfy." This way the cable companies can allow the customer to decide which is more inconvenient – "to wait around all morning, or wait around all afternoon." I'm sure the cable guys in the corner office felt pretty good about their progress with this new plan.

But they were still missing appointment windows. So the main trade association for franchise cable, the NCTA, created a Moneyback Guarantee several

years ago, to be paid if technicians were not on time. (I bet installation income dropped shortly after this guarantee was put into effect.)

There are lots of reasons to miss an appointment window. Some of the excuses are understandable – weather delays, traffic, or being held up by the previous customer. But with today's GPS technology, appointment setting, planning, and resource allocation, making an AM or PM window should not be too difficult. And knowing where you are on the route would be helpful. "Am I your next stop on the route, Mr. Cable Company?"

## Timeliness Counts

Years ago I met a lawyer who said that most of his clients really didn't know if he was a good attorney or not. "Why?" I asked. "Couldn't they see your ability to interpret the law?"

"No," he replied. "They can't evaluate my legal skills; but they can certainly evaluate my timeliness."

How true that is for us. Some of our customers may not be able to "evaluate" our product compared to others. But *all* customers can evaluate and judge our "timeliness."

One of the most important "first impression" measurement points for cable companies is the first phone call to set up the appointment for installation. How long is the wait, how many days for the install, how big an appointment window?

But if we want to dazzle our customers? Then private cable operators should find a way to do the install the day the customer calls. Am I serious?

Yes. How is it that PCOs spend so much time worrying about how to offer better service than the franchise guys when there is clearly a great opportunity to beat them on this very issue? In the MDU business, we know that 60 percent or more of our units will churn in the coming 12 months. And we generally know what time of year this will happen (more in July, less in November, large numbers on the first and fifteenth of each month). So why not build an installation scheduling program that allows us to build in the resources and availability to accept orders and fulfill them on a moment's notice?

Can you imagine the look in the property manager's eyes if we accomplished "same day installs?" Our franchise cable foes certainly would be shockingly alarmed. Most of them are stuck on trying to reduce one-week waits and four to six hour appointment openings.

In an era of companies offering to customize computers for delivery tomorrow, PCOs should try to find ways to dazzle our future subscribers (and property owner clients) with the ability to do an immediate install. If cable and satellite providers are sitting in the top 17 out of 3,000 industries in lousy BBB ratings, then we should focus on ways to be in the bottom 17 of Better Business Bureau complaint totals.

PCOs should make devising this "quick-connect" system a priority. "Call before noon, installed before evening."

I ran this concept by a property manager the other day to see what her reaction was. "Are you kidding," she asked. "I love it. My future residents who never plan ahead for their cable TV service before move-in day would be thrilled!"

Maybe we should try to get all PCOs to consider this feat. Then we can turn some of our industry's BBBs into AAAs. **BBP**

## About the Author

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