

The Cable-Operator Call-In Show

Video providers have to pay better attention to their competitors' relative strengths and weaknesses – and to their own – as the industry's technology and economics change.

By Bryan Rader ■ *Bandwidth Consulting LLC*

As I write this column, we are smack dab in the middle of the lead-up to Super Bowl week, and the hype is deafening. No, I am not talking about the player interviews, or former coaches with expert opinions about both teams. I am speaking about the banter going on full blast among sports radio call-in shows around the country.

Guys are calling in, yelling their opinions about their team's QB rating, ability to come from behind, or advantageous turnover ratio. Others are calling in screaming about their team's ability in the red zone, their long list of Pro Bowlers, and how well they did the last time the teams met.

It's non-stop. Each call is louder than the one before. Rabid sports fans with too many statistics (and obviously too much free time).

There are so many callers nowadays that some sports nuts will wait on hold for 45 minutes to make a point in 20 seconds. And sometimes they are so impassioned, they let a curse word slip and poof...they get bleeped out altogether.

It's hard to listen. Unless these callers were piping in about something important, like selecting a cable TV provider for their property, rather than selecting a Super Bowl winner. Then the back-and-forth banter, and statistics, and red-zone capabilities really would matter!

MY SPORTS BAR DREAM

As I daydream about a call-in show taking opinions from franchise cable, private cable and phone companies, I begin to realize that this type of radio program would exceed the Super Bowl hype, and might be a lot more exciting. At least to some of us!

Turnover ratios. Kicking game. Pass defense. All of these "arguments" would be replaced with themes such as "channel selection," "pricing comparisons" and "service capabilities." And the on-air boasting would be interesting. Let's listen in....

"How can you say you're better?" an MSO caller would exclaim, raising his voice. "I have more HD choices, more VOD titles and quick response time!"

"Are you kidding?" an independent private cable operator would yell back. "Do you consider 7 to 10 days to install new service a quick response? That's ludicrous. I can do it this afternoon!"

"Guys, you are missing the point," a third caller from the local phone company would fume. "It's not about movie titles or programming. It's about the infrastructure, and mine is an all-IP platform. How can you beat that?"

The PCO screams louder and barks back like a sports fan with statistics in hand. "Didn't you have software problems for over a year with your network, and batteries blowing up in your neighborhoods?"

The MSO caller jumps in, "And you had an all-network outage on a football Sunday, affecting every single subscriber! Frankly, I don't think the battle is about infrastructure."

It's tense, and noisier than a pre-Super Bowl debate. If these three callers were on a conference call moderated by a property owner arguing why they have earned the right to serve his property, the noise level would be ear-piercing. It would make sports call-in shows seem peaceful. Keep listening....

"I offer choice, customization, flexibility and great service," the PCO

proudly announces. "You both offer none of those things."

"But we offer a great triple-play package for everyone – it's the same everywhere," says the MSO caller. "We offer more programming for all walks of life. If you want it, we might have it."

"Like the NFL Network?" laughs the PCO. "Do you have that? Or custom property channels? Or extensive Spanish packs? Nope. Score a win for the PCO!"

"Uhh, well, we ah...we have the ahh... well, we're working on those things," the MSO pipes back in. "What about you, Mr. Telco?"

"It's all about the infrastructure, guys – we'll figure out the rest later," the RBOC states.

The equivalents of cable-operator call-in shows are happening all over the industry these days among all three types of video providers. Hone your argument. Play to your strengths. Overcome your weaknesses. And know your competitors' positions well. The most well-informed sports call-in guy usually wins the argument. You know this if you listen to sports radio before the Super Bowl.

It will happen among cable operators too. Good luck on your call-in shows! Just don't let a curse word slip...or you'll get bleeped out! **BBP**

About the Author

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