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A telecom industry veteran, Sandy spent 18 years with AT&T before moving to the broadband world. She joined her husband Dave Waks in their consultancy, System Dynamics, in 1996 and has been focused on consumer broadband ever since. Sandy splits her time between consulting, co-writing a monthly report on new broadband developments, and being a Skype video-addicted grandmother.

Two Sides to

Sandy Says: Don't Make It Hard for Me To Defend You

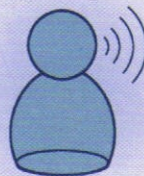
Since this is our holiday issue, it seems fitting to tell a story about my family. My daughter and son-in-law, who live in Silicon

Valley, have had me on the spot twice now about defending the cable industry. When they wanted to upgrade to digital cable about eight years ago, our son-in-law stayed home for three successive appointments scheduled by their cable company. When the cable guy failed to show up the third time and the CSRs were unapologetic, they switched to satellite. They soon added DSL and swore they'd never go back.

Recently, cable's superior speeds, lower latency and bundled triple-play offers combined to sway them to give cable another try. Everything went fine until the utility company replaced a pole outside their home while they were away one weekend. On Monday morning, our daughter discovered that Internet connectivity didn't work. She picked up the phone to call for assistance — and didn't get a dial tone.

Since her husband — let's call him J — is the family geek, our daughter used her cell phone to call him at work to ask what to do. He walked her through looking at the status lights and resetting the cable modem. When that didn't work, he told her how to look at the secret management page of the cable modem. All symptoms pointed to a problem outside the home.

J diverted his attention away from his job to help resolve the issue. He decided to use the MSO's online chat system to talk to a tech, using the information he already had gotten from his wife to answer the tech's questions. After about 45 minutes, the tech needed more feedback on the status lights so J called our daughter and relayed the questions and answers. The tech said he was unable to ping their cable modem remotely and couldn't log into the headend device to see if their modem was connected.



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He concluded that there was a physical problem and they would dispatch a technician to investigate — three days later! J reminded the tech that their phone was out, as well as television and Internet, and was told that was the fastest they could dispatch someone. J asked what they would do if the whole neighborhood was out, and was told they would dispatch an emergency repair crew immediately. When asked how he knew it was not the whole neighborhood — since the likely cause was the pole replacement — the tech replied: “No one else has called.”

To quote J: “No words could really express my feelings about that answer, but it sure sums up what is wrong with cable telephone.”

When he got home from work that evening, J looked at the cabling. Work on the pole had pulled the drop cable too tight and it had broken about two-thirds of the way between the pole and their house.

As befits a Silicon Valley techie, J had RG-6 cable, connectors, crimpers and couplers in the garage. He patched the cable and reconnected it, and they got phone, television and Internet back. Three days later the cable tech came out and did a proper fix.

What's wrong with this picture? When a triple-play house loses all their service, can't automated tools flag it and proactively deploy repair? Don't cable's telephone customers require expedited response times? If they're going to trust us to handle all their vital voice, data and video communications, we need to respond quickly to total outages. Cable's competitors have invested heavily in the tools to monitor all the CPE at the customer home and proactively respond to outages. They're well into deploying these tools and starting to use them to gain a competitive edge.

To all of you out there, here's my plea. You have superior products. Please make it easier for me to defend why cable is the better choice.