

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

Screw you, you're just the customer, go to hell

It was one of the comedians off an old "Women of the Night" tape I used to have, after a particular zinger against an ex quipped "some of these I do just for me". Which probably applies to this entire category which I've just created: How to lose customers. I've had one of those mornings which leaves me simply astounded. How can half the businesses I have interacted with today survive let alone turn a profit?

In the macro objective Vulcan view of things, times must simply be too good right now. Too much easy money sloshing around the economy, people clamoring to buy things they don't need with money they don't have. A sense of entitlement prevails among many businesses, kind of like "Give me your money. Shut up. We're doing you a favor. Now get stuffed".

In today's case the overall winners:

Home Depot Yes, I mention them by name. Going to Home Depot for me ranks somewhere below having having a tooth filled. There are not enough staff on the floor and when you catch somebody they tell you That's not my department, shrug and move on. Today I had a guy tell me "I don't work here". He was sitting at a desk in the middle of the flooring department, feet up on the desk, talking on the phone. He sure looked like he worked there to me. When I snagged another passing clerk for assistance she pointed at that guy. "He claims he doesn't work here" I told her. "Can you find somebody who will admit to working in this f***ing department so I can buy some f***ing underpad from you?" (Ok, I didn't say it quite that way, but the way she reacted to me, you'd think I did). She walked over to the intercom and made an announcement "Staff to flooring, staff to flooring, customer waiting". This has happened to me before in Home Depot. It's a ploy, the paged staffer will never arrive, and the one who made the page slinks off immediately afterwards, washing their hands of the situation.

I get back home, late, from Home Depot, and I've missed the heating and air tech who was to come by and look at our non-functioning forced air unit. The unit is still non-functioning. But it has a new filter. He told the person who let him in (and who pointed out to him that the unit was still non-functional) "that's not what I'm here for, I'm just here for a service call".

Call FIDO because they keep calling to renew a cell phone in the company fleet that I already renewed over a month ago. Fido's voice mail hell SUCKS:

Welcome to fido, blah blah blah, you now have 3 options....

beep you now have 4 options...

beep you now have 8 options

"Oh F*** off!" I scream, audibly, and within earshot, my wife admonishes me, of our 18 month old daughter.

All of the above activity is an affront to the customers of any business. Clearly, there is no incentive to do better. Home Depot is enjoying a red hot housing market and all the associated benefits, and a company like Fido, even with wireless number portability a reality in Canada, finally, seems to think there simply isn't an upside to eliminating byzantine call menu labyrinth's from their customer experience.

I would like to remind all the complacent, smug, dosile businesses out there that things won't remain flush and easy forever. There is a global recession of cataclysmic proportions headed our way, and I guess it is during times like that when "everybody sits down to a banquet of consequences" as they say.

Every time I get shabby treatment from a business, I briefly ponder starting up a competitor and entering that space myself. After the anger subsides, my opportunity radar kicks in.

easyDNS was built largely in the wake of another monolithic company's incompetence. 20 million+ disgruntled customers who back then had no other choice. It was a monopoly industry that was suddenly opened up to competition, and then 20 million customers fled like bats out of hell. They were getting treated so badly, being subjected to such rotten service, they'd sign up with anybody who didn't spit on them and it would feel like they were getting the royal treatment. Nevermind actually being helpful, respectful and courteous to them - that reeled them in for life.

I have seen behaviour today that would never occur among my organization. While we don't have a lot of our strategies formally written in a manual or anything, I like to think that there is a prevailing common sense ingrained in the company. If a domain is down, for example, it is quite simply everybody's problem. Everybody in the company would know enough to take enough ownership of that problem that they aren't going to let it go until they've found somebody who can fix it and assigned it over.

You can bet that if one of our staff looks at a customer domain and finds another problem that has nothing to do with the original ticket, he or she isn't going to shrug and say "that's not in the trouble ticket" and move on. They're going to flag it.

There is no shrugging "that's not my department" at my company. There may be "I don't know how to answer that, but I'm going to find you somebody who can", and that is not the same thing as the aforementioned Home Depot mystery staff page.

We are on the cusp of a global transition from a seller's market to a buyer's market in pretty well everything. Smug, aloof businesses will either have to get real humble, real fast or they will simply be swept away into the economic dustbin of history where they belong. So it goes.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in How to lose customers at 13:10

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

Don't forget to vote in the CIRA Board elections

I just finished voting in the Canadian Internet Registration Authority Board of Directors election. This year's election is the first under the new election process and reformed membership structure that was ushered in last year at the special member's meeting in Toronto.

I have mixed feelings about the new membership reform, having spent a good deal of my term on the Board working on it and finally seeing it get ratified by the membership shortly after the end of my stint. I found the re-authorization process of the membership confusing. If I found it confusing, having been in the belly of the beast so to speak, it must have been utterly unfathomable to a lot of casual .CA domain holders. I think 90% of .CA domain holders don't even really understand who CIRA is or why they consistently get cryptic emails from them telling them to authorize this, confirm that, verify your id ("your paperssss pleasss").Continue reading "Don't forget to vote in the CIRA Board elections"

Posted by easyDNS: of Interest in via easyDNS blog at 10:52

Tuesday, September 4, 2007

iPhone unlocked on the Fido network using Turbo Sim card

I bought a turbo Sim card on the aftermarket (at a pretty inflated price), from PDAPlaza, it arrived pretty quickly.

I was going to wait for a software unlock but I broke down before the weekend and grabbed a couple turbo SIMs.

There are a lot of docs out there on what to do, I thought I'd post a quick summary of what you need to do to get iPhone unlocked on a Canadian network like Fido or Rogers (I guess the point is this works on pretty well any GSM network)

In a nutshell, here's what you need to do to unlock your iPhone with a Turbo Sim card:

Get an iPhone. I had a friend ship up a couple from Chicago via FedEx a few weeks ago and have been using it as a WiFi device, without the phone, until now.

Get a turbo sim card. They are manufactured by Bladox, out of the Czech Republic. But the bad news is, since it was discovered these work on iPhones, demand skyrocketed and they are perpetually sold out. You may end up having to buy one on the aftermarket. Prices range from \$100+ (check Craigslist), I got mine from PDAPlaza.ca for \$175. On eBay prices are as high as \$600+. It'll be interesting to see what the software unlock will do to these prices.

Make a note of your IMEI and your ICCID. If your phone has been hacktivated (this means you have activated your iPhone without signing up with AT&T and can use everything except the phone), you will find it under Settings -> General -> About if you've already activated your phone, or by pressing the "i" icon on an unactivated phone.

Jailbreak and activate your phone, or activate and then jailbreak. The activation, like I said, gets you using the iPhone features except the phone, jailbreak allows you to install other applications and mods on the phone (which you'll need to install the turbo sim stuff). I used this guide for the Mac OS X to activate and jailbreak with iActivate.

You need to then install ssh, I found two tutorials, this one worked for me, and this one does a good job of explaining how what you are doing to the phone actually works, although after I completed the latter tutorial, I couldn't ssh into my phone, but I could after following the first one. (it took me a couple go rounds at this, I started from scratch twice, by resetting my iPhone to the factory defaults via iTunes)

When the tutorial goes through the bit about compiling iPhuck, don't. I found a binary download somewhere for the Mac, although I can't find the link at the moment. When I do I'll update this.

I didn't bother using Cyberduck or Fugu, I'd just scp stuff over from the Mac shell.

Once you're done that, you're finally ready to install the turbo sim. There are two methods of doing so, "ISA" and "Applesaft", this is the definitive guide for the Applesaft method, I couldn't find a tutorial for the ISA method. The difference between the two is the ISA method ONLY requires that you have to cut your target sim card to attach the turbo sim, the Applesaft method requires you cut both your target sim and the ATT sim which came with your iPhone. The Applesaft method basically is you put the turbo sim in with the original ATT sim, and install a turbo sim software bundle, then remove the sim combo, and attach the turbo sim to your intended sim card (in my case, my Fido sim, with the corner cut out) and after a power cycle of the phone, away you go. The turbo sim came with a cardboard diagram of how to cut the sim which I used as a defacto template/pattern. Not really my forte (anything bordering on a hardware mod) but I muddled through.

Update: May as well activate the iPhone for the Edge with Fido, so when I'm not in a WiFi hotspot I can at least access the internet over GPRS. Under Settings -> General -> Network -> Edge enter:

APN: internet.fido.ca
user: fido
pass: fido

So now I have a fully functional iPhone on Fido. I wonder what tomorrow's big announcement from Apple will be and whether they will address the groundswell of unlocking activity the iPhone has generated.

Posted by Mark Jiftovic in Hacking tech at 23:40