

Background

I live in a rural regional area near Kangaroo Valley NSW.

My company Lazyfish Technology provides computer related services for the bulk of the local population. In that capacity I have a unique insight into the problems local residents and businesses face in being part of the online community and marketplace.

My customers include many small and large business, farms, and individuals from a broad spectrum of the population; company executives, artists, farmers, entrepreneurs, traders, academics, judges, musicians, radio presenters, politicians, health professionals, students...

Current access

Less than 40% of my customer base (1000+) would have access to ADSL broadband. A small percentage of the ADSL users have access to ADSL2 but for most people the maximum connection speed is 1.5mbps.

The other 60% rely on 3G or NextG mobile broadband, satellite or dial-up connections to the internet.

All mobile broadband connections provide a much slower and more unreliable connection than the same service in better coverage areas. Our maximum connection speed seems to be between 700kbps and 1.2mbps even for 7mbps and 21mbps plans.

Satellite connections can supply up to 2mbps but in reality this is rare and the latency of a satellite connection makes it unsuitable for many uses; e.g. VoIP and video conferencing – services of particular significance to remote rural dwellers.

Dial-up connections usually have a maximum speed of 28kbps although I have some customers who can only achieve 9kbps. A speed Telstra says is within their acceptable limits.

Large numbers of my customers also have no mobile coverage and experience long interruptions to phone service following our frequent extreme weather conditions and falling trees.

Costs

Regardless of the non-ADSL connection method available, my customers can expect to pay significantly higher monthly rates. Additionally these inferior methods are generally capped at quite low monthly data allowances which results in excess charges. I have had customers with bills exceeding \$1200 per month in these excess charges.

To add insult to injury many of customers have fibre optic cables passing their front gate but no solutions are proposed to improve their internet access.

This lack of reasonably priced high speed internet access limits my customer's competitiveness in the marketplace and stops them from accessing many of the online services available to the bulk of the population. This is an additional cost they have to bear. This situation will only worsen.

Technologies

In my opinion, technologies that could improve services in our area are ignored as telecom operators push unreliable mobile broadband services in the interests of their own profits.

The small population base means that there is no business case to provide the additional technology required to provide a reasonable service.

For example ADSL boosters have in the past been tested by Telstra to extend the availability of ADSL greater distances from the exchange. This technology appears to have been deliberately suppressed to avoid competition with the NextG and 3G markets.

Some years ago, before ADSL was available, we partnered with a company using wireless technology to beam bandwidth into the valley from the coast. Although this was successful, it appeared to be deliberately sabotaged by the sudden offering of ADSL (to a few) and the lack of government support for small operators as the various subsidy programmes frequently ran out of money or changed their rules.

The current NBN plans appear to in no way address this problem so we expect no improvements in the future. I think that the disadvantage suffered by regional Australia is a disgrace and against basic principles of equality that is to be expected by all Australia residents.

Robert Morgan

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