

Comment of Mr. Dhanasekar B

Apr 11, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a DTH subscriber and would like to give me comments on your "Pre-Consultation paper On Set Top Box Interoperability" released on 4-Apr-2016.

As you rightly said, the restriction imposed by DTH providers on the STB affecting consumers like us. Though the providers charge consumers a hefty price in the name of non-refundable installation fees covering the cost of STB , we end up stuck with them because we do not want spend a large amount on set top box. Currently almost all providers charge double the price of initial subscription once the initial subscription period ends. For example, first time installation costs INR 2000 for a HD STB and with 2400 a customer get a year's subscription first time. The next year, the price increases to 400-4800 for a lowest HD package.

When we switch providers, these STBs end up in e-waste. A waste mart owner nearby says he receives 2-3 STBs weekly to be disposed creating a large pile of e-waste where we have a poor e-waste management.

I would like to propose a 2 step approach to enable interoperability of STBs. First , Enforce the providers to unlock their STBs to let the customers to tune to free-to-air DTH signals irrespective of whether the customer is active subscriber or not.

As a second step, TRAI can encourage providers to work together and standardize their EMM &ECM algorithms for interoperability. This would be easier as all the providers do an automatic upgrades to the STBs over the AIR (OTA) with a direct control on STBs.

Enforcing providers to allow access of free to air channels (FTA) will serve two purposes. Give more channels to the customer in addition to what has been subscribed. To the providers, this can be a selling point with more channels on one hand and force them to provide better price and content than FTA channles other hand to get the customer subscribed. Indirectly this will also force providers to work together and come up with a inter-oprable solution saving the cost of STBs and compete in pricing and content to retain customers. Merely enforcing inter-operable STBs alone will look good initially, but over a period of time providers will form a syndicate increasing the prices. We have seen this happening now in cellular data space, where all providers increased the price to INR 255 /GB from 90-150 even when there was huge growth in customers and their internet usage. So I believe enforcing them to unlock STBs first for FTA channels will give customers an upper hand and maintain competition between providers . This will also encourage channels to negotiate with providers to reduce their transmission

charges they charge to channels.

Thanks

Dhanasekar B