

Comments on DTH tariffs¹

Ever since new tariff policy has been introduced, the monthly subscription bill has gone up significantly whereas number of channels available have gone down. So in a sense the policy is not customer friendly, rather the way in which new policy has been implemented, customers have been subjected to more tariffs with poorer service and a raw deal. The response of DTH operators has been very insensitive. Following suggestions may be considered by the TRAI:-

1. The different broadcaster bouquets in present form generally appears okay but there are many channels which are still not covered in bouquets. It must be ensured that every channel is covered in some or the other bouquet. Alternatively, a miscellaneous category may be introduced in which all other channels may be included.
2. Once a customer has subscribed to an HD channel, the corresponding SD channel should be automatically enabled at no extra charge. Sometimes due to poor connectivity/ bad weather HD channel doesn't come in which case customer can see SD channel. There is no point charging additional money for same SD channel. The same facility was earlier available prior to introduction of new tariff policy.
3. There should be no bar on discounts offered on individual bouquets. The more the discounts, the more customer benefits.
4. The peak tariff of Rs.19 for every channel is okay or may be reduced to say Rs.15. However, if it is HD channel, corresponding SD channel should be automatically covered at no extra cost.
5. Often it is observed that when u add ala-carte channel, even if the channel cost is Rs.2 per month, a fixed tariff of Rs.23 is added on presumption that for every 25 channels, additional NCF is added. There should be only one base NCF and should not have multiple slabs asking for additional Rs.23 as every channel is already priced. It also makes no sense to count an HD channel as 2 channels for the purpose of NCF as cost of HD channel is itself higher than SD channel.
6. There must be one package which includes all channels irrespective of individual bouquet prices. It may be priced at Rs.699 inclusive of taxes. Presently I have subscribed Airtel's highest cost package of Rs.699 per month, still a large number of channels do not come. Everytime I have to add another channel, its cost is added and with changing slabs Rs.23 is added as NCF. My tariff has already reached Rs.800 and still a large number of channels are left out.
7. There should be a fixed price of say Rs.200 for every additional TV at home. Whatever channels are subscribed in main connection, should automatically come in second or third TV. This used to happen prior to new tariff system. Currently second TV is also costing about Rs.500 per month whereas the number of channels is far lower than main connection.
8. The system of subscription of channels should be easy. Websites should be customer friendly. Today it's a complex system and one has to grapple for hours to add or remove a channel. Every after adding or removing, system update takes long and sometimes for days that channel is not added or deleted even as the cost is deducted upfront.

¹ From Dr. Yogesh Suri, Sr. Adviser, NITI Aayog. Views are personal.

9. I had subscribed to annual package of Airtel. However, on its own, Airtel has discontinued package even though 3 months had left. Perhaps that was not allowed in the new tariff policy.
10. There must be a system of long duration packages with further discounted offers. Once package is adopted DTH operators should not on their own discontinue the package. However, customers should be free to discontinue long term package and get corresponding credit for remaining period of the package should they chose to discontinue the same.