Dear Spectrum,

PRINT THIS EMAIL OUT, TAKE IT HOME, RELAX, CRACK A BEER, AND READ MY SAD BUT TRUE ALMOST 5000 WORD STORY. OR DOES THAT MAKE IT A SAGA?

On 2/25 I recently upgraded to your 400Mbps Internet service after having your adequate 100mbps service for some 2 plus years here in Francis Creek. We are both retired now, and held captive in our home by the pandemic and the caravans of fools who refuse to listen to science, not wear masks, create new variants, will not take the vaccine, and may drag this virus situation out for generations, or at least for our lifetimes. My wife and I really don't like people coming into our home as we both have preexisting conditions which make us susceptible to the virus. Although we have had the vaccine, we would rather be served by one smart technician, than three not so smart ones, who in the end accomplish nothing.

Anyway, I did not perceive a speed upgrade, I did this upgrade *online* and received no notification of when it would become active, so I called your tech support and they told me that the new speed had in fact been turned on the previous week. I explained that I was not able to discern any difference and after arguing with them for a while, they dispatched a technician who I will call Technician One from the Two Rivers office a few days later.

He tested cable signal strength and bandwidth with his meter and pronounce it to be OK. I told him that I am only getting 150-200 from my Ethernet port on my router. He said that my router was _stuck_ and that I should replace it.

I explained that based on my thirty years' experience with 1200-56kbps dialup modems, having been an ISP, having had ISDN, DSL, TWC cable in Racine and Kenosha, and wireless broadband in both Racine and Cambridge that _stuck_ was _not_ a thing. That this is science not magic, it is Ethernet which is a networking standard developed by Bob Metcalf et al many years ago as a grad student at MIT and engineer at the famous Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC).

I persisted, also showing him that I could only get 100 mbps on wireless with my new Win10 MS Surface Pro tablet 802.11ac connected at 5.2 GHz, so he replaced the modem with an identical modem, did not retest, and accomplished nothing. He said that there was nothing else he could do and left. Well intentioned, yet ill equipped. We certainly do not want Technician One back in our home after his recent vacation in Mexico during a pandemic.

I currently have six computers, two tablets and a smart phone. They are a mix of Win7, Win10, and Android. A mix of wireless "n" and "ac" all connecting at 5.2 GHz. They all have gigabit Ethernet connections except for one tablet and the phone.

I then called support again the next day to complain and argue, so they dispatched Technician Two the next week. He is a so-called commercial installer who claims to know everything about everything. Just ask him.

He said that he had spoken with Technician One and again came at me with the _stuck_ router thing. This must have been a concept introduced in a training session at the Two Rivers office, because it was assimilated wholeheartedly by this group. I told him to envision corrupted flash memory, or a bad EPROM chip as a potential problem but since there was no grease zerk on it I had no way to unstick it.

I questioned his testing meter, asked him to use a laptop, any laptop. He said that the company laptop he had in the van would not see 400mbps at the modem either. I asked him to explain that and he said that he did not know why and that there was nothing he could do about that. He said he could not do anything until I replaced my $300 five year old R7000 Netgear router. He said just to buy a cheap router and that I didn't need an equal or better router than I had, and said the coverage would be the same to my deck and garage. It is like his lie about the problem, if made cheaper to solve, would make me swallow it easier. I knew this to be false, because my router covered 2000 sq. ft. and the cheap ones maybe 1200-1500 sq. ft.. So after speaking with Netgear tech support, I procured a discount and ordered this upgrade to a $350 XR1000 Netgear Wi-Fi 6 router covering 2500 sq. ft.

After a few days I texted him that the new router did not fix anything and that I had tested two additional computers of mine and got the same bad results from the modem Ethernet port. After a series of contentious text messages that I retain but will not repeat except to say that your corporate office would not be proud of this employees conduct in person or via text. It ended with him saying that there is nothing he could do for me and me saying that he should not confuse _can't_ with _won't_. Technician Two lied to me so blatantly and repeatedly to the point that I had to replace the worn out batteries in my Bullshit Detector after he left.

I complained again on yet another tech support phone call and a guy named Rubin after arguing with me for a while about my insistence that my experience tells me that this is a provisioning problem, refused to connect me by phone to a network engineer. I asked him what Internet service he had and he said Spectrum 400mbps and that he was getting 400mbps at the router and 300mbps on his wireless devices. I told him that I also wanted that, so he said he would dispatch a field supervisor to my home. (Multiple of your tech support people told me that this could not be a provisioning problem because the Upload speed increased from the old 10mbps to the new 20mbps speed.) I did then and do now believe that this is nonsense and a result of poor training and lack of intellectual curiosity by your employees. A phone message then informed me that I would get a service call the next week between 5-6 pm. Expecting a field supervisor, I was surprised to see Technician Three the guy who had installed my line two plus years ago. He went about solving the issue in a workman like manner, testing, and replacing the connectors and ground block in the basement and connectors at the outside box. Again with his tester he pronounced everything to be OK. Yet they all continue to blame **MY** equipment.

Without having a full understanding of your testing equipment, I will suggest the following analogy. If you test the battery in your car with a voltmeter, you will likely get a reading of 12 volts. However, if you want to know how the battery performs when the starter is engaged or the headlights turned on, you need a load tester to pull a load against it. I believe this to be the fault of your test meter, unknowingly or purposely.

By running continuous randomly bad speed tests, I eventually convinced Technician Three to call a field supervisor. It was then that Field Supervisor One asked if this was an upgrade when I answered Yes, I learned that Technician Three was surprised by this. He had not been dispatched with this info and didn't figure out himself that 2.5 years ago he installed 100mbps and now was looking for a 400mbps connection. Anyway Field Supervisor One offered that this was a provisioning problem, like it had happened before.

So they re-provisioned my modem and we gained nothing. Prior to this, on speaker phone, I quizzed Field Supervisor One about the bad "N" Hitron modems the Intel Puma chipset I had read about and how the Technicolor with the Broadcom chipset doesn't have these problems like DDoS, cable haunt, security problems that caused slow speeds, dropouts, and packet loss. He was unfamiliar with any of this information. https://www.yourbestdigs.com/reviews/the-best-modem-for-spectrum/ I would already have this modem elsewhere in the country where 400mbps is being offered, except for the technology backwater of Two Rivers of course. Reminds me of only being able to get 2400kbps in Racine back in the 90's. But I digress…

After the re-provisioning did not work and me still holding him hostage. I asked him to use a laptop for testing and he said that installers such as himself were not provided with company laptops. Perhaps all your installers should be equipped with an uncrippled laptop to use for _real world_ testing. Technician Three didn't want to connect to my wireless with his phone at first because he didn't have my Wi-Fi password. I offered it to him if he agreed to delete it after as I had also done with Technician Two earlier.

Funny story here, not. I told Technician Two to delete my password after I gave it to him so I won't find him sitting at the curb using my Internet connection. He said not to worry because my Internet connection sucked so bad. Funny huh?

I kept Technician Three here at my house about 2.5 hours and he was not particularly happy but he did try hard unlike Technician One or Technician Two. (your phone message after all says that the service call could take between one and three hours so I was within that time line.) He was again well-intentioned but yet ill equipped.

After me getting him to test my wireless connection on his phone, and he got 80mbps, Technician Three and Field Supervisor One decided that they would try to find me a Technicolor modem and that is where this stands as of this writing.

Meanwhile, beginning the next day I continued with more testing and troubleshooting connected to the Ethernet port of my router.

I then got this once and have not been able to repeat it:

So this then disproves that there is anything wrong with my equipment.

A little later in the day, I got this:

If you run this same test three times in a row and average them out, I will be around 250mbps.
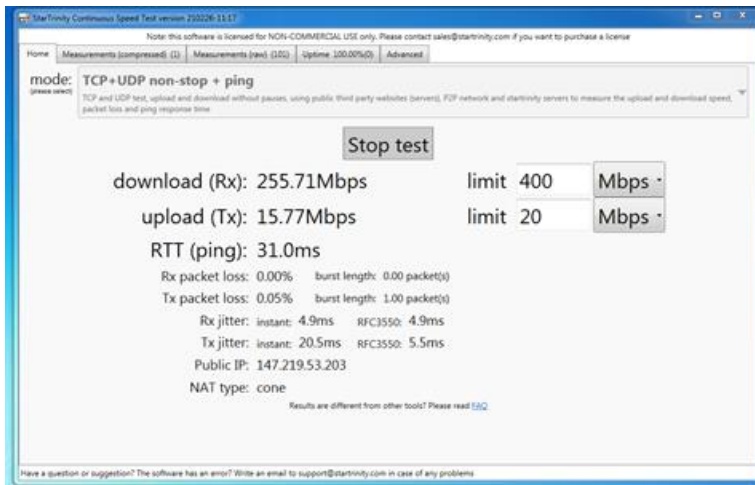
So this proves the random nature of the 10 second tests on the speed test websites.
Compare speedtest.net, Spectrum speed test, Affinity speed test, dslreports, and fast.com sometime to see this for yourself. They are all over the place.

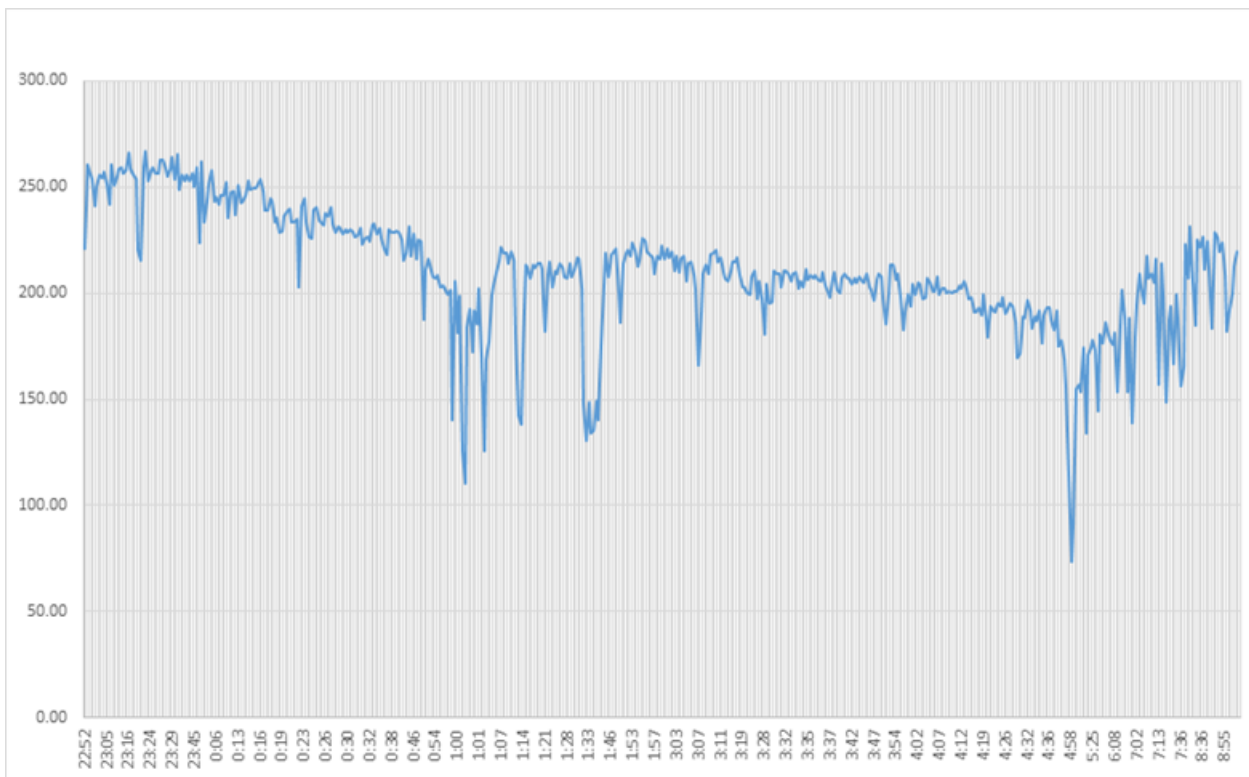| Test Site	Speed		
ATT	140		
Broadband Now		39	
Cox	158		
Fast	190		
Speedtest	369		
Speakeasy	212		
Spectrum	332		
Speedcheck	128		
testmynet		36	
Xfinity	156		
Average	**210.625**		

Speed tests 8:30 am Monday 3/22.

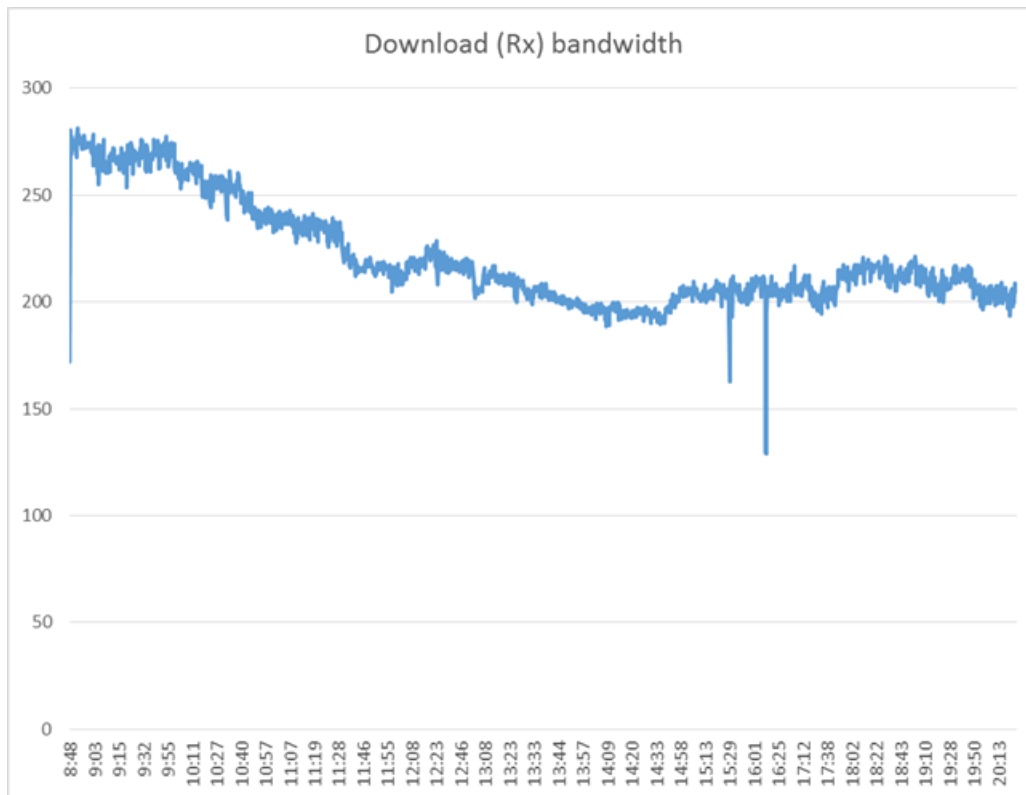So I installed a professional continuous testing software package, did a 30 minute test, and got this:

So this test points at your provisioning/equipment/ network as the problem(s).

If you still have doubts, I exported the test data to Excel, and have a look at this ten hour evening snapshot that looks like a bad EKG.

UPDATE 3/17/2021

Did some daytime testing and got this: (supporting data for these carts is available)

Download (Rx) bandwidth

300
250
200
150
100
50
0

8:48 9:03 9:15 9:32 9:55 10:11 10:27 10:40 10:57 11:07 11:19 11:28 11:46 11:55 12:08 12:23 12:46 13:08 13:23 13:33 13:44 13:57 14:09 14:20 14:33 14:58 15:13 15:29 16:01 16:25 17:12 17:38 18:02 18:22 18:43 19:10 19:28 19:50 20:13

Called your Tech Support yesterday as I got impatient not having heard anything since last Thursday when they promised me a new modem, real soon now. Ended up speaking with one of your Customer Service Leads, Bob. He looked at the case notes which inconveniently do not hold any reports from the three techs that have been here. He ordered a service call with a supervisor for this week Thursday.

Today shorting after receiving a recorded message from you about this visit, I get a call from a supervisor named Field Supervisor Two who says he is in the area and wants to stop in. His demeanor on the phone was immediately adversarial, not inquisitive or concerned, and not appropriate for what your company has put me through this point. In this very short phone call where I agreed to his visit, he acted angry that I would not listen to the proof provided by his staff that everything was fine, despite my clear evidence to the contrary.

Field Supervisor Two arrived with this adversarial tone immediately, which can be verified by my wife who overheard the conversations. I showed him my evidence that it was not working correctly, which he dismissed out of hand. He explained that the company never anticipated so much network traffic due to the pandemic which is overwhelming the network. This reminded me of what Technician Three had said to me early in his visit last week, that their network was at 98% of capacity. Nice! I told him I wanted to get what I was paying for and that if Spectrum could not provide it they should stop selling it or at least stop billing for it. This would be the ethical thing to do. Half the price for half the speed would be about right, until you upgrade your network.

Field Supervisor Two was eventually able to find one website and one server where he could get a 400mbps test result. But only one, and only once in a row. All other evidence points to the contrary. He persisted that the problems was in my head and not a functional problem because I was not seeing the 400 number and I had to explain number of different times that my router input speed directly impacted my nine wireless devices none of which would show a speed much higher than 100mbps.

I told him that he needed to stop trying to fix this problem mentally and become intellectually curious and customer focused enough to solve it physically.

Field Supervisor Two gave me the whole "what do you expect me to do as I am just a lowly cable installer" routine proving once again that the Peter Principle is alive and well at Spectrum. He mentioned that he didn't understand all of this new technology as well as his need to retire a number of times. I told him that he could escalate this up to the next

level, Bob in Customer. Ser. had told me this over the phone yesterday, and he claimed that he could not a number of times until he eventually relented and agreed that he could do that.

He reminded me of the David Bowie song, Ground Control to Major Tom, where the lyric is "And all this science I don't understand, it's just my job five days a week."

I eventually got him to replace the Hitron modem with a Ubee modem which Technician Three had promised last Thursday and it made no immediate discernable difference. And I eventually got Field Supervisor Two to connect his company laptop to the modem under his terms that if he got something near 400mbps he would leave my home and consider it mission accomplished. He did that and much to his confusion, he was unable to achieve half of that number. He continued to blame my equipment however, even though this had been proven wrong with three previous techs. He said that he didn't want to talk about past history. He also said that Spectrum never anticipated all of these people being home using their Internet connections during a pandemic. Again hinting towards network overload.

I gave him printouts of my test results to share with his counterparts in the Appleton office, and he agreed to have conversations there and perhaps escalate this case if required. The whole idea of Spectrum sending Supervisor Two here to fix this actual problem mentally rather than physically, with an aggressive in your face attempted intimidation style followed by the fallback position of aw-shucks I'm just a lowly cable installer persona so feel sorry for me, was an EPIC fail for Spectrum.

Maybe we can finally work the problem here. I spend my whole adult life around computers and my thinking remains "Spock" like meaning logical, and scientific. I don't brook theories, speculation, and beliefs like "stuck" routers.

I am anticipating the arrival of yet another field supervisor with a Technicolor modem in his pocket and a better understanding of both his job and your data network sometime tomorrow 3/17 morning.

UPDATE:

So Technician Three and Field Supervisor One showed up this morning. They did some testing, some work on the coaxial line, some more testing, replaced the Ubee modem with a Technicolor at my request, did some more testing, and became puzzled at the unchanged results.

He actually used his laptop for wireless, router, and modem testing rather than a phone. This is real progress!

Field Supervisor One was personable and interested in finding solutions and not assigning blame. He exhausted most of his ideas and said he would return next week to continue testing around the neighborhood with a test modem. This is the first visit by Spectrum where I was **not** frustrated and upset after it occurred. My wife and I remain **outraged** at our treatment by Field Supervisor Two during yesterday's visit and Technician Two's visit previously.

Field Supervisor One was kind enough to provide me with his email address so I shared with him the data that created the charts shown above. I also shared yet another alternate idea for testing download speed, by actually downloading files. It did shock me however to learn that the same guy who claimed to have looked at the overall network bandwidth utilization for several months and said it was OK, and also looked at the modems of my neighbors in this subdivision, but did not know if any of the other 25 or so homes here were provisioned for 400mbps or 1000mbps service. This to me would be a key piece of information, but what do I know.

At least now after five visits by five technicians, over what is approaching one month and again in the midst of a pandemic, we have finally graduated from the:

1. The initial it's the customer's computer
2. To it's the customers router
3. To it's the customers home wiring
4. To it's the wiring at the PED
5. To it's the servers on the testing websites
6. To it's the testing software the customer is using
7. To it's *our* network that is the problem, I guess we had better test that

This is progress. To be continued…

3/24 So I am waiting to hear back from Field Supervisor One on his local network testing results:
    In the meanwhile, I have discovered that a network trace route shows 17 hops (routers) to get to my Internet provider Spectrum.com, yet only 13 hops to my email provider Cyberlynk.net.

    Today I replaced the existing Ethernet Category 5e (1Gbps) cables from my router to your modem, and from my computer to my Netgear RX1000 router with Ethernet Category 7 cables (100Gbps). I did this not because I am expecting or need 100Gbps bandwidth from Spectrum, but because of the exceptional electrical shielding on these cables that will eliminate any chance of existing electrical interference. I just want the 400mbps you charge me for and not the 200mbps or so you are currently giving me.
    And…Despite some positive results stories found on Amazon and YouTube, I found no discernable difference in speed with these new cables.

    But really? From 1200kbps to 940mbps over 35 years? Hell, there is at least 20 years of promising fiber optic cable in there. All of you in the telecommunications industries, should be ashamed of yourselves, if that is the best you can do. As if that is what the country that invented the Internet deserves. Kids seeking an education are shut out because they are too far into the country or too deep into the cities and there is just not enough money to be made there for you despite the government corporate welfare you receive.
    Professionals trying to work in this pandemic have to put up with stuttering video calls, even live on national TV. You should shutter every time you see this. And yes, feel ashamed. And especially for the dropped connections for the kids struggling to learn. But I digress…

    VPN testing:
    There has been some conversation between Technician Two, and Field Supervisors One and Two regarding the VPN software on Spectrum company issued laptops and them not delivering the same speed test results as a phone.
    Since I don't have one of your laptops to use for testing, I decided to test this on my own using PIA VPN software. (Again, being retired on a fixed income, I certainly have more time than money)
    So the results were as expected for me, a minor 20mbps loss in bandwidth, and an expected 11 ms significant increase in latency (ping). Basically an insignificant difference overall.

    I am starting to question your network architecture after this testing:

Set by speedtest.net as optimal (closest)			
Renaissance Learning, Inc. Wisconsin Rapids, WI	https://www.renaissance.com/	153mbps	18 hops
Preferred by Spectrum techs			
Nsight Green Bay, WI	https://nsight.com/	231mbps	18 hops
CyberLynk Network Milwaukee, WI	https://cyberlynk.net/	319mbps	13 hops
Ethoplex, LLC Milwaukee, WI	https://www.ethoplex.com/	273mbps	12 hops
• Always six hops through Charter routers • Less hops appear to equal higher speed test bandwidth			

    So as it turns out, me getting Field Supervisor One to give me his email address was a pyrrhic victory because he is unresponsive to my emails.

This whole experience has apparently brought out my inner B.B.King blues

Your Six Hops Are Bringing Me Down (My traceroute leaves no doubt, and it make me want to shout)

With six or more hops to anywhere
Spectrum is getting me nowhere
I want to go to Amazon to buy underwear
But I need to take six hops just to get there
Chorus: My traceroute leaves no doubt
And it makes me want to shout
Your six hops to anywhere are bringing me down
I need nine hops to get to Google
Try to get that into your noodle
When it takes six hops to the bank to get my money
I am not thinking that gee this is sure funny
Chorus: My traceroute leaves no doubt
And it makes me want to shout
Your six hops to anywhere are bringing me down
In this pandemic where stupidity seems to be endemic
Nine hops to order groceries only feeds the epidemic
Spectrum won't give the speed that they promise
So I've come to realize that they have led me amiss
Chorus: My traceroute leaves no doubt
And it makes me want to shout
Your six hops to anywhere are bringing me down
And unlike the six degrees of Kevin Bacon
With six hops to anywhere, it's no speed that I am take 'in
LiMu Emu and Doug say to pay for only what I need
But after paying Spectrum more, I can't even get their promised speed
Chorus: My traceroute leaves no doubt
And it makes me want to shout
Your six hops to anywhere are bringing me down
Five of their technicians seem clueless to you
They all say there is nothing they can do
I guess it could be said if you pay Spectrum
You are going to end up getting it in the rectum
Chorus: My traceroute leaves no doubt
And it makes me want to shout
Your six hops to anywhere are bringing me down

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C:\Users\User>tracert spectrum.com

Tracing route to spectrum.com [142.136.168.7]
over a maximum of 30 hops:

  1     2 ms     1 ms     1 ms  192.168.1.1
  2     *        *        *     Request timed out.
  3    31 ms     9 ms    10 ms  crr02rochmn-tge-0-2-0-9.roch.mn.charter.com [96.
34.25.20]
  4    25 ms    17 ms    15 ms  crr02ftbgwi-bue-202.ftbg.wi.charter.com [96.34.3
0.20]
  5    17 ms    22 ms    17 ms  crr01ftbgwi-bue-300.ftbg.wi.charter.com [96.34.2
4.2]
  6    21 ms    20 ms    20 ms  cts03alxnmn-tge-3-0-0.alxn.mn.charter.com [96.34
.25.137]
  7    21 ms    22 ms    24 ms  crr01rochmn-bue-2.roch.mn.charter.com [96.34.25.
166]
  8    25 ms    25 ms    26 ms  crr01stcdmn-bue-6.stcd.mn.charter.com [96.34.25.
0]
  9    42 ms    30 ms    98 ms  bbr02slidla-tge-0-1-0-6.slid.la.charter.com [96.
34.1.188]
 10    97 ms    49 ms    47 ms  bbr02chcgil-bue-1.chcg.il.charter.com [96.34.1.1
49]
 11   113 ms    45 ms   110 ms  bbr01chcgil-bue-800.chcg.il.charter.com [96.34.0
.66]
 12   105 ms    43 ms    42 ms  99.ae14.pr0.lax00.tbone.rr.com [66.109.1.18]
 13    65 ms    65 ms    64 ms  66.109.5.137
 14    63 ms    63 ms    64 ms  be5.ar3.pkv01.tbone.rr.com [66.109.10.99]
 15    64 ms    63 ms    63 ms  be3.ar0.pkv01.tbone.rr.com [66.109.10.93]
 16    64 ms    64 ms    65 ms  66.109.6.245
 17    63 ms    66 ms    65 ms  165-237-51-29.twcable.com [165.237.51.29]
 18    64 ms    66 ms    65 ms  10.6.148.6
 19    65 ms    63 ms    66 ms  twcdigitalphone.com [142.136.168.7]

Trace complete.
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Back in the early 90's when I started connecting to the Internet you judged an ISP by how many hops to the POP. (Internet Backbone) This was especially important with dial-up connections. In the trace route above you can see my packets ping ponging around your network about 19 times. I don't know if this is a result of your merger, I don't know for sure that it is part of my problems, but I think that you really need to clean up your shit here.

I can understand me hitting your Two Rivers router, your Eau Claire router, (where your speed test server is) but then it should hit the Chicago or Minneapolis POP real soon in my mind. Of course I am not a network engineer, just a lifelong computer geek and an unhappy customer.

I have had no contact with or communication from Spectrum in more than a week now, leading me to believe that they have now just blown me off. So maybe it's over now.

Well, after five consecutive days with my various test results, the last of which acknowledged my blues and included the lyrics above… I got a phone call from Field Sup One.

He said he had done some testing in my neighborhood earlier in the week at a few of my neighbors and had the same poor test results that I experience. I asked him again if anyone else in my subdivision could get a higher speed and he told me that was a Billing thing and he didn't have access to that database. He said that his meter reads fine and when I suggested that the meter might be the problem he scoffed at the idea. Instead he is going to order yet another test modem and perhaps a different laptop to do more testing next week. He said the system tested good at the Two River office fiber outlet, so I asked if he tested at the node where the fiber terminated and the coax started in my area and he said that he didn't know where that node was. Really? How many months will it take to get this escalated to your engineers?

It seems to me that your plan here is to find the right combination of modems and computers to fix this mentally with me, rather than trying to fix it physically. I am now fully and completely fed up.

IN A WORLD OF "SOME SETTING OF CONTENTS WLL OCCUR DURING SHIPMENT, BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED, OBJECTS IN THE MIRRORS MAY BE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR, WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THESE TERMS AND CONDIDTIONS WITHOUT NOTIFICATION", WE NOW GET FROM SPECTRUM "WE ONLY GUARENTEE 70% OF HE SPEED YOU ARE PAYING FOR." AND YOU CAN'T EVEN MEET THAT LOW BAR." LAST TIME I CHECKED, 70% IS A C- IN SCHOOL.

I have discovered in going through **all of this** what the majority of your staff is **not**, and that is intellectually curious. Not just about their job duties but about related things like routers, modems, and computers. This is a missing ingredient for quality service, in my view.

One of the keys to my success in creating and running two IT related businesses over thirty years was a strong curiosity and interest about all things computer and telecommunications. The pace of change and complexity in this business over these past 30 years requires this attribute to even do it, much less be any good at it. This embedded interest continues today into my retirement and is also a key to many others in tech like Bill Gates and Elon Musk.

So all of this started with me taking a chance on a Spectrum upgrade to improve my speed rather than getting a Starlink satellite dish from Elon. This situation has cost me countless time and frustration as well as the cost of a new router. All of this for a retired guy on a fixed income, with too much time on his hands apparently.

I don't really know how much of all of this can be blamed on ignorance/incompetence and how much on malfeasance/skullduggery but I suspect that a big portion of each is involved. Keep in mind that I would already have 200mbps service like the rest of the country, except your monopoly requires you only do this when you have to compete with AT&T fiber.

Remember, you started this by taking my money and lying to me by blaming my equipment, and it's still not fixed a month later. This should be a cringe-worthy technical support and management horror story for anyone reading it.

PS. I can't wait to talk to your billing people and try to get them to not continue to charge me for what I still don't have.

PSS. I know you probably don't care, but try to Imagine if you can, two really badly rated corporations who merge and change their name (disguise) but who then to the surprise of everyone seek to redeem themselves in the eyes of the general public by spurring economic development in rural areas by providing a service that boosts educational and employment opportunities for its human capital. They then choose this task as their raison d'etre and as their primary goal superseding maximizing remote shareholder value. They come to understand that you can do well, and do some good at the same time. Just imagine it.

Got the Spectrum
Blues.mp3