

# Maddog Unleashed

## 'Servicing the Account,' Or Getting the Business From Customer Service

*"Qwest's continuing success and excellence depends on everyone's uncompromising commitment to the highest standards."*—Dave Heller, chief ethics and compliance officer, on the company website



**BY PATRICK O'GRADY**

Ever find yourself chained to a customer-service treadmill, the sort of mind-numbing slog that makes you think you've stumbled through a wormhole and into one of those endless queues in the old Soviet Union?

I've spent a couple weeks sampling the high standards of Qwest, whose motto is "Spirit of Service," apparently in homage to George Carlin's routine about how giant corporations take their cue from animal husbandry when "servicing the account."

We've paid Qwest for phone and Internet service since 2002, and while the bills may be large, at least they're incomprehensible. Still, everything worked, more or less, until our second ActionTec modem failed in August. I called technical support, which exudes a strong whiff of the Subcontinent, and was told I needed a new modem, which would not arrive for at least 24 hours.

This being a Thursday, and delivery an inexact science, I contemplated four days without the Internet and called a local Qwest office to see if they stocked the proper hardware. They did, or so they said, so I phoned customer service to cancel the modem shipment. And that's when the fun started.

**The Three Stooges Are Alive and Well.** It took about an hour and three of the four reps working the Qwest shop to find the modem and enter the requisite data into their computer. While I waited, the more enterprising of the Stooges upsold me to a higher connection speed. Why not? I thought. A cycling journalist can never be too rich, too thin or have too big a pipeline to the Intertubes. And off I went, new modem tucked under one arm.

Setup was a mild hassle. The new modem was a 2Wire Gateway, and as I am technically challenged, configuring it required a few more halting conversations with offshore techies. Eventually I got it running and we were back in business—for four whole days.

**When Up Means Down.** Seems that when Qwest "upgrades" your connection, it first degrades it—by disconnecting it entirely, sometimes for as long as three business days, which as you know is three weeks in dog time, especially when the dog is on hold with someone in Islamabad.

Meanwhile, the modems had begun arriving. UPS delivered two additional and unordered Gateways before another tech told me that model wouldn't work with my new-and-improved servicing. What I needed was a Motorola Netopia 3347.

Well, now I have one. It may be the official Teamster edition, because it takes regular breaks from delivering data. I have configured and reconfigured it, hard reset it, even sacrificed a Trek Antelope to it, all without success. Like the ActionTecs before it, it has been diagnosed as defective and another is en route.

So now I have four useless modems scattered about. Well, not entirely useless. I have opened their boxes and sprinkled them with kitty litter, and the cats find them suitable for their business needs. When the boxes are filled to overflowing, I will ship them to Qwest's corporate headquarters in Denver via bicycle courier on the first day during which temperatures exceed 90 degrees.

While I wait, I will try to calculate how long a bike company would remain in business if its average customer ordered, say, a road bike, was given a featureless cardboard box later found to contain a mountain bike (with some assembly required), then spent the next two weeks on hold with an Indian technician calling himself Alvin, watching UPS stack boxes of mountain bikes on his doorstep.