

February 11, 2014

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Verizon Wireless  
ATTN: Correspondence Team  
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Re Account: 425-770-0470

To whom it may concern,

Apologies in advance for the long letter. But I wanted to relate to you the horror I experienced over the past two months getting an incorrect billing problem straightened out. So I am going to relate the story to you as it happened to me so that you can get some feel for what this experience was like from a customer perspective. All total I talked to 11 agents for between 30 to 60 minutes per call during 8 calls – a total of roughly 6 hours of my life drained away for no good cause.

It all started last spring when my husband and I decide to take a 2 year sailing trip. We knew we would be spending a lot of time in Canada and Mexico, and hence started comparing cell phone plans to determine what would be best for us while traveling. We decided on Verizon's Canada & Mexico plan which gave us 1000 roaming minutes for an additional \$15 per month. So in March of 2013 we left T-Mobile to become Verizon customers. We set off from Seattle in May 2013 north through Canada. By October we had gone to Alaska, had turned around to head south and made it to San Diego. During our trip through Canada and back into the US, I had been adjusting the amount of data available on the plan based on our need. When in Canada I would turn the data amount down as we didn't want to pay data roaming rates, and when we came back to the US, I would turn the amount of data back up. Most of the time I did this by calling 611 and speaking with an agent. But in September, I decided to go self-service and make the adjustment using your website.

In Early November we left San Diego headed for Cabo San Lucas Mexico. Imagine our shock when the bill came on December 7<sup>th</sup>, and it was over \$1000 of which there was roughly \$800 in Mexico voice roaming charges.

In the end it was determined that a bug in your website was to blame. I can only imagine the number of customers who have been similarly affected. And while my issue has been pretty much resolved (other than the data charge issue I detail below) the pain you put me through was excessive. I've both blogged about it and talked to as many friends and family as will listen about why they shouldn't do business with Verizon Wireless if they can avoid it.

I spent much of my career in IT, and did stint with Microsoft working on their customer service agent systems. So I've not only detailed for you what happened to me, but also some root cause analysis of what specific agent training and systems issues you should look into. Here is the detail of what transpired during the past two months:

**December 11** – This was my first call to Verizon on this issue. Agent #1 told me that the roaming charges were my fault because I made a change to the voice plan in September - changing it to a domestic plan. I explained that was impossible as the whole reason we moved to Verizon was specifically to avoid Mexico and Canada roaming charges because of our travel plans. Agent #1 told me that because I made a change through the Verizon website that I am completely responsible for the changes. Had the change been made by phone by one of their agents - then maybe I could claim the agent made a mistake. But because I did it through the self-service website - Verizon knows it's my responsibility. I told the agent that I have spent my career career in technology - and if Verizon changed the voice plan when I went in and adjusted the data amount - then there must be a bug in the website. I can tell the agent doesn't believe me. None the less, Agent #1 says that they are willing to credit half the charges for the "misunderstanding" and promises to call me back the next day on the remainder of the bill once they finish their research. The agent then issued a credit for just over \$100. How \$100 is half of \$800 isn't clear to me. I never received a call back.

**AGENT QUALITY ISSUE:** *Clearly Agent #1 didn't do as promised by setting up a case in the system, nor in issuing the 50% credits he said he would. Someone should alert his supervisor so that some corrective action can be taken.*

**December 14** – I called again. Agent #2 informed me that the agent on my previous call had not set up any sort of case as was promised that would have generated a call back. She was one of the most meticulous agents I spoke with during this saga. She did a full up review of my account. She found \$90 in charges for data that were charged incorrectly. She said the agents I talked to in June and July when I changed the data amounts applied the timing of the data charges incorrectly. Despite my efforts later (see call on February 11), **this \$90 was never credited to the account** and I later learned that Agent #2 has left Verizon and this issue can no longer be resolved. On the topic of the \$800 in roaming charges, she informed me that the account was changed to a domestic plan via the Verizon website. I again told her that no way would I have done that. The whole reason that I switched to Verizon was specifically for the Canada Mexico plan. Moreover the only change I had done on the website was to adjust the amount of data on the plan. So if the voice plan was changed it had to be a bug in your website. She said she would try to put through the credits but did not hold out much hope because they are under instructions never to credit back for "mistakes the customer made using the website". And indeed no credit was issued – presumably having been rejected by the supervisor.

**AGENT TRAINING ISSUE:** *Telling customers that you will credit mistakes made by agents – in essence because the customer can dispute what was said during the conversation, but not because something bad happened when they attempted to use website self-service is a bad idea. It discourages future use of the website and thereby increases the number of customer support calls and hence increases Verizon support costs in the long run.*

**December 19** – Because I had been a Microsoft employee when I switched to Verizon, I thought I might try to resolve the issue through the Verizon support on the Microsoft campus in Redmond. I called them, and Agent #3 informed me that there was nothing they could do. So I called 611 again and got Agent #4. I told him I wanted a supervisor. He insisted on researching the issue before he would turn it over to a supervisor. At first he told me he was sure Verizon would issue a credit, then later retracted that saying the same thing I had heard previously – that the changes were my fault because I had used the website. He then transferred me to his supervisor, Agent #5, a guy named Courtney in the Georgia call center. I had the same go around with Courtney who informed me this whole fiasco was my fault and there is nothing they can do. At this point I lost my cool completely and started hollering at Courtney about how there is no way on God’s green earth that I authorized a change to the voice plan. Data amount yes, voice plan no. That you must have a bug in your website and that I absolutely refuse to pay this outrageous bill. By now Courtney is telling me that I have to “calm down”. I informed him that I was not going to calm down. This is Verizon’s fault and they won’t do anything about it. So Courtney says, “fine, I’ll tell you what, I’ll go to the My Verizon website and see for myself how it works”. I said that would be great. A few minutes of quiet go by while he logs in and tries to make a data only change to the plan through the website like a customer would. Then he says, “oh shit”, and goes on to explain that international plans are not supposed to be serviceable on the website – and that the agents have been trained that there is a pop up that informs customers that they will be changed to a domestic plan if they make any changes on the website, but the message isn’t showing up. Hence the reason no agent has been willing to budge on this issue – they have all been told a warning is issued that the customer has to acknowledge before the changes are made to their account. He sheepishly says that in fact there is clearly a bug in the website. He says he will call me back as soon as he can talk to the back end team. An hour later he calls back. He says that indeed back end team has verified the problem is a bug in the website. But it’s going to take them a while to figure out how to process the credit because they may have to program up a big batch job to credit all customers affected by this issue. At this point, I asked him to please turn off the automatic payment withdrawal, and to manually process a payment for what we believe the right amount on the bill to be. He says that making the payment early isn’t necessary. I tell him that I want to show good faith here and make it clear I’m not a deadbeat trying to avoid paying. So I insist he process the payment. At the end of the call he gives me his name, and how to contact him back directly. He promises that he will be back in contact once they have figured out how they are going to process the credit. He says he has recorded all this information on our account so that any agent will clearly be able to see that we are due the credit. He seems quite genuinely sorry and keeps apologizing for the frustration I experienced getting the issue resolved. At this point I thought the problems were over. T was not to be.

**SYSTEMS ISSUE:** *Hopefully someone there at Verizon is taking the underlying web bug seriously and crediting all the affected customers. I encountered the bug in September and it likely existed for some time before then. It was still there when Courtney tried to prove me wrong in December. That means there was at least 4 months of international plan customers not being warned they couldn’t service their plan through the website without changing over to a domestic plan. This is ripe for a class action suit if not acted upon soon.*

**AGENT TRAINING ISSUE:** *I had been insisting there was a bug in the website all along. Yet it took losing my temper completely before any agent would listen and research the issue of a website bug. I get this is a tough balance as customers will likely say anything to avoid paying large bills. However, I kept explaining that I spent my career working large corporate systems – and that bugs like this are not uncommon. I had some credibility based on specific details I was able to relate to the agents about what I had done, what website screens I had viewed along the way, etc. Agents need to have a way to identify customer issues like this that should be escalated for investigation before a customer has to start screaming to get some action.*

**January 7** – I receive an email from Verizon stating that my account is overdue and my phones at risk of being turned off if immediate payment isn't made. So I call and talk to Agent #6 who informs me (contrary to what Cortney told me) that there was no way to get back in touch with Cortney directly. All she can do is open a case and assign it to him. She assures me I will get a call back within 24 hours.

**SYSTEMS ISSUE:** *On a complex issue like this, I should have been able to continue to deal with Cortney rather than have to deal with so many different agents. It was a complete waste of my time and theirs to have to explain this complex issue repeatedly. But there was no way to actually get back in touch with Cortney despite his having told me that I could be transferred back to him if I called back in.*

**January 11** – Not having received the promised call back, I call again and talk to Agent #7 who puts the account in “dispute status” so that the phones won't be turned off. I am again promised a call back.

**SYSTEMS ISSUE:** *Something is broken in the “we promise to call you back” process. Despite numerous promises no one **ever** called back.*

**January 14** – No call back (by this time no surprise) so I call again. Agent #8 tells me that she can see that Courtney has been working the problem as there are status notes on the account indicating that he has checked on status with the back end team, but there is no indication as to when the problem will be resolved. I tell her that I don't actually care when the problem gets resolved so long as Verizon doesn't shut off our phones meanwhile. She assures me that the problem should be taken care of in the next few days “before the dispute status expires”. And that even if the dispute status expires that I will get another warning email giving me 24 hours to call back and reinstate the dispute status. I explain to the agent that isn't going to work because (is anyone paying attention here?) we are traveling in Mexico on a boat and don't always have access to email. She says that's ok because we will get a text message too. I explain that being offshore on a boat means text messages won't work either. So I ask her for a specific date when the dispute status will expire so that I can be sure to be available at that time to call and extend the dispute status. She can't answer this question so she cold transfers me to Agent #9 in financial services. Agent #9 leads with, “I see your account is overdue, are you going to make a payment today?” I about lost my temper explaining that no, the account is under dispute. I then ask when the dispute status will expire and she says it will be soon. I ask if she can extend it and she says no. I then went through the whole saga with her again. She says that when the credit is issued then I will get another email giving me 24 hours to pay the balance. I point out to her that I've already paid the correct

balance in good faith. That finally deflated the “you are yet another scammer” attitude from her and she agreed to extend the dispute status another week.

**SYSTEMS ISSUE:** *I was told that accounts cannot be put in dispute status until they are overdue. Hence Cortney couldn't do it when the problem was first uncovered. This later turned into a huge burden for me to try to keep my phones from being turned off when the billing error was Verizon's fault. Even if it's a feature that only a supervisor has, someone should be able to put accounts on “don't threaten the customer with turning off their phones” status for longer periods of time, and beginning when an issue is uncovered - when an issue is clearly on the Verizon side. Putting the burden on the customer to call back repeatedly within 24 hours of issuing a warning is just plain silly in this circumstance.*

**AGENT PROCESS ISSUE:** *Virtually every time I called I was greeted with the “your account is overdue, are you going to make a payment” line. Agents should be trained to look for the dispute status before they launch into demands for money.*

**January 31** – When I knew the dispute status had expired I call back yet again. Agent #10 was a guy named Keegan. I told him that I was super angry and to please be patient as I told him my saga. When I was done and after he had reviewed all the notes on the account, he said “I am so sorry. Someone should have taken responsibility long ago to just issue the credits to the account and not put you through this.” So he went and discussed it with his supervisor and they agreed to just issue the credits and be done with it. Which he did. He also promised to call back the next day and make sure that I can see the credits have come through correctly. He never did call.

**February 11** – After the next bill is sent, I can see that the account has been credited for the roaming issue. But the \$90 in data charges from June and July found by Agent #2 have been lost in the shuffle. I call in and talk to Agent #11. After extensive research he finds that Agent #2 didn't leave enough notes to actually tell what the specific issue was and hence there is nothing he can do about it. I ask him to send her an email and ask her to call me but he says that she is not in the company directory anymore.

**SYSTEMS ISSUE:** *Agent #11 indicated that the extensive notes put in by Agent #2 had likely been truncated by the system – hence all the work she had done was lost.*

I would be happy to discuss any of the systems issues further if it would be helpful in getting them addressed. Meanwhile know that I find myself utterly disgusted by Verizon's customer service and plan to move my cell phone service to a competitor as soon as practical.

Regards,

Melissa DeLong