

Internet and Television Service Bait and Switch



The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity and respect

Most people want the best rate they can get for internet, cable television, or satellite television service. Some providers offer aggressive promotions that claim to save you money. But watch out, as these providers may try a “bait and switch” scheme that causes you not to receive the promised rate.

What Is a “Bait and Switch” Scheme and How Does It Work?

“Bait and switch” is a fraudulent sales tactic. Some internet and television providers use a version of “bait and switch” to get people to buy their services. These companies “bait” consumers by advertising promotional rates that promise to save consumers money. When consumers purchase the service, the companies then “switch” to a more expensive rate. The first time consumers may learn of the “switch” is when they receive their bill from the new company.

Tips to Avoid Being a Victim of “Bait and Switch:”

Ask for all details about the promotion the company is actually offering.

Before you buy, ask about the following and take good notes of the company’s responses. Better yet, get it in writing. Ask the company to clearly disclose:

- **All rules and exceptions.** Some companies offer promotions that come with dozens of complex rules and exceptions. Ask the company if the quoted price requires you to agree to any additional terms, or if there are any exceptions that might cause you to not receive the promised rate.

- **The total monthly price.** Some quoted prices come with a series of additional fees that significantly increase the amount you will pay. In addition to confirming the base product price, be sure to ask about all additional fees the company will charge that will increase the price you actually pay. Ask the company to tell you the total monthly price you will pay.
- **The length of the promotion.** Some low “teaser” rates are designed to get you to sign up but end after a short time. Ask the company how long the promised price will last.
- **The rate after any promotion expires.** Some companies give people initial “promotional” rates to get the customer in the door but increase their prices by large amounts after the promotion expires. Ask if a promotional rate applies, and if so, ask what rate you’ll have to pay once the promotional rate expires.
- **Early cancellation penalties.** Some companies charge people cancellation penalties for ending service, even to consumers who do not sign a contract. Ask whether you may cancel the service at any time without penalty. If there is a penalty, ask how much it is and how long it applies.

Get the offer in writing.

A reputable company should be willing to send you an email, letter, or text message putting its promises in writing. Be wary of companies that will not put their offers in writing. If the company tells you it will provide the information after you purchase the product, make sure that the company actually sends you this information. Some companies promise to disclose the price and rules of its promotions but never do. Contact the company if it fails to give you this information. If you do get the information, read all of it, especially the fine print.

Take notes.

Take detailed notes about what the company promises, including the price and terms of the promotion. Make sure to note the time and date of your call and ask each employee that you speak with for their name and employee identification number. Knowing and providing this information may help you get the company to honor its quoted prices if it tries a “bait and switch.”

Additional Resources

The Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) is the federal agency with jurisdiction over internet and satellite television providers. To file a complaint against an internet or satellite television provider, contact the FCC as follows:

Federal Communications Commission

Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554
(888) 225-5322
www.consumercomplaints.fcc.gov

Cable television is regulated through local franchise agreements between cable companies and local cities. Contact your city government for a copy of the franchise agreement or to file a complaint.

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office as follows:

Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison

445 Minnesota Street, Suite 1400
St. Paul, MN 55101
(651) 296-3353 (Twin Cities Calling Area)
(800) 657-3787 (Outside the Twin Cities)
(800) 627-3529 (Minnesota Relay)
www.ag.state.mn.us