

The Cable Box Gremlin

By Molly Templar

Disgusted, I stomped out of the family room and went to run errands, hoping that by the time I returned, my new digital cable TV box would be talking to my flat screen TV. The coffee table was littered with remotes, batteries, my cell phone, and my laptop. An hour ago I could watch anything I wanted to on television. Now all I saw was the famous blue screen of death. How did that happen?

It all began when I got a better “deal” on my monthly cable/internet package. All I had to do was pick up a new digital box from the provider, connect a few cables, and enjoy the wonders of digital cable at a savings of \$20 a month. You know the old adage: if it sounds too good to be true... . Why did I think this would be different?

So one afternoon last week I picked up the cable box. It sat on the kitchen counter for a few days before I had the courage to “just plug in a few cables.” When I unwrapped the box I had a sinking feeling. There were no directions, just a web address where help was only a few clicks away and a phone number for technical assistance. Oh, how I long for the days of written manuals and directions.

I have set up our TV before and have a good understanding of how it works so, using the diagram on their website, I plugged in all the cables. But when I turned on the TV, all I got was a blue screen with the message “no signal.” I rechecked my connections and input choices then made sure everything was plugged in and the power was on.

Next, I picked up the phone and called technical assistance. “Please listen carefully as our menu has recently changed.” I sighed deeply. “For sales, press 1, for billing, press 2, for technical assistance, press 3.”

I pressed 3 and waited. “If this is about the internet, press 1. If this is about cable TV, press 2.”

Expectantly, I pressed 2 and was treated to a not-so-brief interlude of music as I drummed my fingers on the coffee table.

Finally. “Good afternoon, my name is Raj and what is your name?”

“Helen.”

“For security reasons, may I have your account number and password please?”

“I already programmed those in when I navigated your menu. Why do you need those again?” I asked wearily.

“We want to be sure our records are accurate and secure.”

I complied and then explained my problem.

“Oh,” replied the technician, “connecting to a flat screen can be a bit tricky.”

Just my luck. The condescending tone in his voice told me he had pulled up the account profile and discovered that I was considerably older than cable TV. He continued, “Ma’m, is the box actually plugged into the wall and turned on?”

My blood pressure began to rise. “Yes sir, it is.”

He tried a few more fixes, but the screen was still blue. He gave me a few more suggestions of things to try and told me to call back later if those didn’t work.

After trying all of his suggestions, I looked at the dead box with despair. I decided it was time to go run my errands in hopes that the cable box and the TV would find one another while I was out.

Now I realize there have always been problems with TV’s. Our first black and white Hoffman was in a huge mahogany cabinet. Sometimes the picture had big diagonal lines, sometimes there was lots of snow, and sometimes the entire screen was green. Often my dad would take the tubes out of the TV and test them at the liquor store on a large device that looked like a pin ball machine. If it was more complicated than replacing a tube, the TV repairman came would have to come to our house with his big box of tools.

Unfortunately, when I returned from my errands, the gremlin in my cable box had not made peace with my TV. Now, I was forced to call the technician.

The cable repairman will be coming next week with his big box of tools. In the meantime, I poured myself a glass of wine and curled up with a good, old-fashioned book.

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