

The Cable Guy

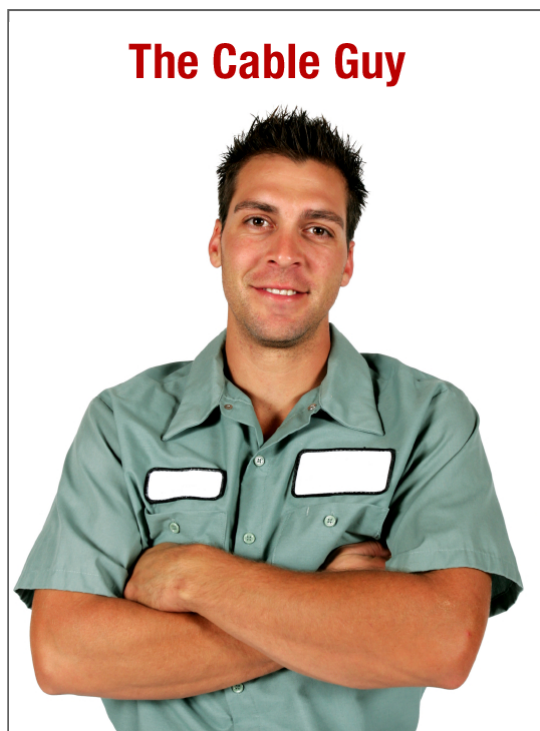
By Nathan Schulhof

In 1994, I was patenting and building the first device known as "The MP3 Player," and making plans to engage the predominant cable companies for the delivery method. That same year, we received a lot of national Press and TV coverage over the announcement of our intentions to build the first portable digital downloadable player which drove mail and phone calls. Cable companies had the only infrastructure in place, high speed cable lines in place with which to send color and video for TVs. I could see a perfect marriage to download audio content through their high speed cable to your computer and then to a portable device... hence *The MP3 Player* (www.nathanschulhof.com). At the time, Ted Turner was making statements proclaiming cable set top boxes and cable modems would be operating in the majority of homes within the year. I don't think the fact that this didn't happen until many years later was any lack of vision from Ted Turner. The problem I experienced was trying to get large cable companies on board with my vision. They had the only goose capable of laying golden eggs, but at the time, the companies were run by a small group of near sighted marketers.

However, not all cable executives were in the dark. We received an exciting call from an executive with Cox Cable in Atlanta, GA. Myself and my team were excited about this because we needed a large cable company partnership in order to deliver and to test our products. After a lengthy phone discussion with this visionary executive, we planned a meeting with his team in Atlanta.

We arrived at the Cox facility in Atlanta and were escorted into a conference room with our VP contact, and five of his senior managers. Back in 1994, cable companies were charging \$10.00 per month and HBO had not yet been widely accepted. I laid out my proposal to utilize their high speed cables (which they had in place long before the phone companies) to distribute rich content to a portable digital player. Unfortunately, the only visionary in the room was the VP. He was surrounded by senior managers incapable of seeing the possible gold mine. I distinctly remember one woman's response, "We have a difficult time getting 10 bucks per month, no one is going to pay an extra 5 dollars per month for special services." Most had a grouse lack of insight for the future. I knew then that their lack of vision would make for a tough sale, and within the year realized cable modems would not exist in homes as Ted Turner had foreseen for years to come.

The internet which was run through phones lines with slow cable modems were just beginning to explode. Most computer users used slow speed phone modems in those days. We knew we needed to overcome the speed obstacles by developing technology on our product. Over the next 12 months we moved our vision from cable to the internet. We began building a content rich website and the first portable downloadable digital player, called the Listen-Up Player. The Listen-Up Player won several awards at the consumer electronics show in L.V. for 1997 and 1998. In June of 1999, we broadcasted the first large scale cybercast (broadcast over the internet) concert called Wango Tango from Dodger Stadium. Eighty-five thousand attended the concert as more than a million people accessed it over the internet. Nothing of this magnitude had ever been done



over the internet before.

I have always thought that it was a tragedy that cable companies were run by an obtuse few. The cable companies had more than 10 years of infrastructure in place prior to the telephone companies. Sadly, they did not progress and watched telephone companies rapidly catch up and pass them by. Today the internet supported broadband products from phone companies are far superior to most cable companies.

Fifteen years from my meeting with Cox Cable, in January of 2008, I moved and wanted to have broadband, cable and phones installed in my new home. I had Cox Cable install the cable and broadband and went with Vonage for my phones. Cox's cable gave me immediate problems. The channels would only work in the day time and I could not watch TV at night. Between the months of January to September, Cox Cable was at my home in excess of 8 times. I spent 97.8 hours on the phone with Cox's support staff which almost made support from India a pleasure. I cannot tell you how frustrating it was and still is to deal with the inadequacies of cable companies.

That meeting with Cox Cable back in 1994 kept popping into my mind, and I began thinking not much has changed. No wonder the phone companies caught up and passed them. I kept thinking they owned it all! Because they were run by a few near sighted individuals they lost their edge....they gave up the goose along with her golden eggs.

Finally after eight month of paying for a service I really could not use, I got a hold of a young, energetic cable guy, named Jimmy who came to my house. He was the first from Cox to really listen. I live on a small private road with about 8 houses. I was told by all Cox's support staff, over and over, that I was the only one on my lane having difficulty. Neighbor's confirmed that they were experiencing like problems, and one of Jimmy's updates told me that most on my road have been having the same problems for many months and were also calling support. Jimmy suggested that he come to my home at night and see for himself. I truly liked his energy and approach and felt he was my only savior. I was hugely grateful.

That night Jimmy came over, and saw that TV could not be watched at night. He immediately called in a crew and worked through the night. This went on for a few weeks, but Jimmy kept calling me daily with updates and assuring me he would eventually get to the problem solved and fixed. He even gave me his cell number so I would not have to go through that disgusting support loop that never was able to do anything but frustrate me.

After three weeks, Jimmy and his team found the problem and worked very diligently to solve it successfully. While Cox's tech support phone personnel antagonized me for months and made false claims about my neighbor's seamless connections, Jimmy also arranged for a credit to my account for the months the TV would not work. It is now fixed, but several days a week for 30 minutes or more my Internet and phones go down. Vontage works, too bad it is tied to cable. I heard this once, "If you had a 911 call, would you like your phone handled by a cable company?" Pretty sobering!

Thank you, Jimmy!

Why can't Jimmy be president of Cox?

Nathan Schulhof is a consultant and public speaker. Nathan can be reached through [Barry Bookin Management](#).