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Negotiating a telecom bundle? Fight like a champ!

Going into the ring determined can save you a lot of money

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When it comes to negotiating a price on telecom services, you've got to be tough and hang in there, like a boxer in the ring. If you're willing to do some fancy footwork, throw a lot of punches, and even take a few blows, you could end up winning the big title, becoming the Savings Champion of the World.



My recent negotiations with Verizon over my FiOS package is just one example of how vital it is to fight on, no matter how big your opponent or how many bruises you get.

My story

Having noticed that the promotional pricing on my triple-play bundle had expired, I decided to renegotiate my deal. After all, I had better things to do with my money than spend \$153 of it a month on Internet, telephone, and television.

Going in, I felt well prepared. I had just received a two-year offer from Verizon's competitor, Cablevision, on a triple-play package for just \$84.95 a month. Energized, I called Cablevision to find how much my charges really would be after adding cable boxes, movie channels, taxes, and all the other stuff that people in the real world end up having to pay for. The total: \$117. That was \$36 less than my Verizon bill! Feeling confident, I donned my Rocky robe and headed into the ring.

Round one: Decision Verizon

The first bout didn't go nearly as well as I'd hoped. The rep offered to lower my bill to 138 smackeros, a cut of only \$15 a month. Then came the sucker punch: I'd have to agree to a 2-year contract. And if I broke it, I'd have to pay a penalty of up to \$200. WHAM! Was she really expecting that I would agree to a two-year contract to pay \$20 more a month than the competition was charging? I struggled

to regain my footing. Wasn't there anything else she could do? What if I agreed to pay the \$138? Could she at least eliminate the contract requirement?

Not one of my jabs hit its mark. So I did what any contender would do in such a situation. I asked to speak to a customer retention supervisor.

Round two: I'm down for the count

After checking my file, the supervisor said she couldn't give me any discounts without my agreeing to a contract. I tried one desperate blow after another. Why did I have to rent a cable box for my second television, which I hardly ever watched? Why was I being charged a regional sports network fee when I had no interest in sports (other than the one I was engaged in right now)? Finally, I resorted to my best move, one I had practiced many times. I told her that if she couldn't do better, I'd take the Cablevision offer.

What came next was a shock. She told me, "That sounds like a threat."

I was stunned. Where was the sportsmanship? Where was the referee? Barely shaking it off, I countered with, "Yes, that's exactly what that is, a threat." I felt like a palooka in the ring with a world-class heavyweight.

For advice on how you can save like a champion on telecommunications services, read "[5 Tips for Cutting Your Cable Bill](#)."

"We're sorry to lose you," she said, not sounding sorry at all.

It was the negotiating equivalent of an upper cut, nearly propelling me out of the ring. I should have ducked. Instead, I was down on the mat. I could hear the referee uttering his slow count to 10. Saved only by the bell, I had no choice but to retire to my corner. I hung up.

Round three: I'm singing the Rocky tune

I struggled to my feet, steeling myself for one more bout. This wasn't just for me, it was for consumers everywhere! I called another customer service rep, this time on the pretense of needing to obtain instructions for returning my Verizon equipment and terminating service in preparation for my switch to Cablevision.

After answering my questions, the rep gave me the opening I was looking for the entire match. "So why are you switching?" she said.

It was time for my right hook. I explained what had happened so far, making no effort to conceal my frustration. She said she'd see what she could do. Then she came back with her answer: I didn't need a cable box for that other TV after all; she'd send me something called an adapter, saving me seven bucks a month. And she could do a lot better on the pricing of my triple-play package and movie channels. Bottom line: \$113, \$40 less than I was currently paying and beating Cablevision's offer. Even better? No contract!

So Verizon went down. It was a knockout in the third round. Sure, I was beaten up, bloodied, exhausted, but I was the champ. And I felt great as I did my little Rocky dance, picturing myself sitting on my Barcalounger, munching chips and watching the same movie for the fifth time on Encore.

Epilogue

I do have to admit one thing. The deal is good only for a year. So it won't be long before I'll have to defend my title. But I've already begun training, practicing my footwork, working on my jabs, building up my muscle mass, slurping down goblets of raw eggs. And if there's anything I'm certain of, it's that, when the time comes to go back into the ring, I'll be ready to come out swinging. And I hope you will too!

—Anthony “Rocky” Giorgianni