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**Cable TV Dishes Up 'Triple Play'**

By Mark Friedman  
5/29/2006

In the past five years, cable television providers in Arkansas watched between 15 percent and 20 percent of their subscribers defect to satellite TV companies.

Now the cable TV industry is making a stronger push to win them back by offering three services in one package: cable TV, high-speed Internet and phone service.

Earlier this month, Comcast Cable was the first provider to unveil its "triple play" and offered all services for \$99 for the customers' first 12 months. Other providers across the nation, such as Cablevision, which offers service in the northeast part of the country, are offering new customers the same service for \$90 a month for the first 12 months.

Cox Communication, which is now called SuddenLink Communications of St. Louis, and Time Warner have applied to the Arkansas Public Service Commission to start offering phone service. Cox's application has been approved and Time Warner's is pending, the commission said.

A SuddenLink spokesman said he didn't know when the phone service would be offered in Arkansas along with the cable TV.

The battle for customers won't be easy for the cable industry. It will soon have to fight phone companies as well as satellite TV providers.

AT&T plans to offer its version of cable TV, called Internet Protocol Television, or IPTV, in some central Arkansas markets by early 2007.



Len Pitcock, executive director of the Arkansas Cable Telecommunications Association, says cable has the goods to compete with satellite providers.

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The satellite TV industry, though, isn't ready to throw in the remote control.

The growth rate has cooled, but satellite TV companies still are adding hundreds of thousands of new subscribers every quarter, said Michael Hopkins, senior editor of Media Business Corp., a media research, reporting and consulting firm in Golden, Colo.

“(Satellite TV companies) still are signing up customers, but it’s not at a fast clip as it used to be,” Hopkins said. “What satellite TV needs to do is get out there and really, really aggressively compete – not that they haven’t aggressively competed before, but now it’s gone from a pretty competitive environment to a hyper-competitive market.”

At the end of September, satellite TV subscribers in Arkansas numbered 356,683. But by the end of the year, the number grew by almost 7,200 to 363,874. During the same period, the number of cable TV subscribers in Arkansas also increased – but only by 333, from 519,785 to 520,118, Hopkins said.

“Cable seems to be bouncing back after years of basic customer losses and still adding digital customers and broadband customers,” Hopkins said.

In 2003, satellite TV providers added about 2.3 million customers nationwide. In 2004, the industry added 3.2 million customers. But the number of new subscribers fell back to 2003 levels in 2005, said Michelle Abraham, principal analyst covering converging markets and technologies at In-Stat of Scottsdale, Ariz.

“They’re certainly making good strides and account for a large percentage of the pay-TV households,” she said.

The cable industry will have to overcome two hurdles to win back customers who went to satellite TV, Hopkins said.

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