

Verizon FIOS TV Pixelation

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Summary: Some specific FIOS TV channels were broken. Sometimes they would work for a bit, but they would soon freeze: pixelated, with garbled sound. I also suspected occasional Internet glitches, but they were not repeatable.

The best way to address this is:

1. Make sure all cable connections in the house are tight: at the cable box, in the basement, and at all connections in between. Test a channel that you know has the problem. If that fixes the problem, you have saved yourself the cost of a service visit.
2. Call or Chat with Verizon support. There are only two things they can do for you, so allow them to start by resetting your cable box. When they are done, test the known bad channel – there will probably be no change.
3. Get them to schedule a service visit by a technician, the real thing you want them to do.
4. Refuse any and all attempts to up-sell you. Definitely, don't buy a service contract or upgrade your cable box for this problem. These "support" people seem to mostly exist to sell you stuff, presumably on commission.
5. If they send you a message that they have fixed the problem, definitely test the known bad channel. When it fails, as expected, text back BROKEN. Otherwise they may cancel the service call – or charge you for the service visit, if the problem is fixed!
6. Plan to be there for the entire service period. Brian took a little over an hour to replace the interface in the basement. I tested, and both the TV and Internet work! Because the problem was with Verizon equipment, there should be no charge for the service visit.

In case you care, the gory details follow.

Telephone & Chat Support

During the Olympics a few weeks ago, all our ESPN channels developed major problems, including pixelation, freezing and garbled sound. Like most of the units in our condo complex, we have FIOS, so I called Verizon. We have one TV and one DVR cable box.

The woman I talked to on the phone was extremely courteous and patient, but it became clear that she only had one tool in her box: reset the cable box over the internet. She tried that a few times, perhaps in multiple ways, to no avail. I left her to file the report that ESPN seemed to not be working – I thought the problem

was on their end. Subsequent testing showed a couple of local channels also had the problem, but many channels were fine.

Monday evening, August 16, 2021, I explored the problem in detail. I started by testing many channels. I also tested Internet service:

1. Search the web for Internet Speed Test
2. Press the blue Run Speed Test

Our service is sold as 75 Mbps. The speed test was above 85 for downloads, but hung up before finishing the upload test. A retry produced similar download results and completed the upload test at about 82. Since it was not repeatable, I did not report the glitch to Verizon.

After poking about, I decided to try their online Chat service, to avoid waiting on the phone:

At least 10 TV channels not working. I tested by starting at 576 and descending to 500 with the remote. These stations do not work: ALL ESPN (570 and 2-3 more), 513, 510, 509, 508, 505, 504, 500. Yup, even YOUR station is breaking up. I reported the problem a couple of weeks ago, related to ESPN. The problem was not resolved, and nobody called me back. We don't watch much TV, just got back to the problem tonight.

It turns out that this opening salvo was ignored – they were still automating me – but no problem. I just pasted it in later, once a human was on the other end.

Sometimes it kind of works, then freezes/bands, start-stop.

Ah, I went around tonight and tightened all my cable connections, before testing.

The agent used her tool, and then booked a tech visit (condensed):

Appreciate all your efforts

Let me execute a few commands.

Please allow me two minutes.

I am refreshing the box now.

This will refresh the box and connectivity.

Please allow me two minutes

Please follow the on screen prompts

Help me with the status.

I am standing by for you.

User

do you mean to go upstairs to the TV and turn it on?

Agent

Yes please.

User

"Channel test failed". As requested, I pressed the yellow A triangle on remote. Box stuck at 30% rebuilding... going back up to check.

User

When I finally got through the rebuild to watch live TV, no mean feat, there was no observable change.

I tested 500 (FIOS) and 570 (ESPN), both bad.

Agent

Let me send a technician to work on this.

Before I schedule your appointment, has anyone in your home or business tested positive for COVID-19, had COVID-19 like symptoms such as fever, cough or unexplained shortness of breath in the last 72 hours, or is quarantined?

User

Any time Wednesday is good, although I myself will be out some of the morning, back by 11:15. NO COVID symptoms, but vaccinated.

Also, do you agree that everyone in the residence or business who has not been fully vaccinated will wear a face covering and maintain at least 6 feet of distance when our technician is on-site?

User

Will the tech be vaccinated?

Agent

Yes they will be.

User

Good. Keeping distance is also good.

Agent

I have got this slot for you, 08/18/2021 01:00 PM - 03:00 PM

Shall I book that for you?

User

Yes, Super!

So far, so good. She then tried to up-sell me on a service contract. She said that if they came inside, and the problem was not with my service, I would have to pay for it. I've heard this one before, and refused, not even getting the price.

Service contracts and extended warranties are particularly good deals – for the sellers. As much as half the price may be given to the sales agent, and the company still plans to make money. It is rumored that Best Buy makes *all* of their profit on extended warranties. In a fit of fuzzy thinking, I bit on an extended warranty for a car – and then cancelled. The tab on the refund check showed the 50% deduction from the finance guy's account!

While I hoped not to pay, I'm sure they would rake in more than I would pay today, over some contract period – and I would pay whether I needed to or not.

Then she tried to up-sell me on a new cable box. Since I figured the cable box was likely the problem, it made sense to replace it. Before pulling the trigger, I asked if I should also cancel the service visit. She said no, that I would probably need the service visit anyhow. This blew the fog away. I did not want voice commands on the cable box, anyhow – we use a universal remote and Roku instead of the

Verizon remote anyhow – and why should we pay if their box was defective? I cancelled the cable box upgrade, kept the service call, and got off the line.

There was one shining aspect of that cable box discussion: for the first time ever, Verizon sent me a quote that I could compare line for line with my most recent bill. No more grapefruit to cumquat attempts at inflating our bill. Still, they tried to sell me something I don't need, when I had my guard down.

Service Visit

The morning after the chat, I received a text message:

Hi, it's Verizon. We've done some work on our end & it appears your TV service is fixed. Please check your TVs, and reply FIXED if everything is working.

Yup, they used their tool again, probably automatically. I wasted more time testing channels 500 and 570 and texted back BROKEN OF COURSE. If it was working, I expect I would have had to pay; and I suspect they would not have come, had I not replied. The appointment remained in place, although they did allow me the opportunity in the morning to text back FIXED.

Brian texted me before the visit, and finding I was available, came a little early. He never looked at the TV, proceeding directly to the basement, where the Verizon interface is. He took one look at the old white conglomeration and said it had to be replaced. He said that they degrade, rather than failing altogether, and TV service is the first place it gets noticed. He says this is usually the problem when there is pixelation.

Brian replaced the old equipment with new, black equipment. Because the new gear uses a different connection to Verizon, he went down the street to wherever and reconnected our place to the correct connection there. He came back, connected our inside cable to the new box. I think this is the point where there was a ten minute wait for everything to become operational.

When it was ready, I tested channels 500 and 570, and they were fixed. I ran Internet Speed Test, and it ran smoothly to completion, a little faster on the upload.