

# Talking to *Telstra*: Two Weeks Spent with Australia's Largest Telco

Jonathan M. Borwein, FRSC, FAA, FAAAS

Professor Laureate. \*

August 23, 2010

## Abstract

I am a great fan of the intelligent use of technology. Indeed, I have spent much of my career advocating just such use. The story below is an unexaggerated description of one of the most frustrating encounters I have ever had with a major company. Clearly *Telstra* has never learned what it means to be a responsible private company; to offer genuine service, honest quality assurance, and knowledgeable assistance; to use modern databases or sensible connectivity between parts of the *Telstra* behemoth; to train competent assistants who know and can admit their limitations?

There again, when the main competition is *Optus* what choice does an average Australian consumer—with less knowledge of ICT and less financial resources—have? Certainly my experience must have been a tad unusual or *Telstra* would, I imagine, no longer be in business. That said, I am left scratching my head at such profligate and repeated waste of time, energy and resources by everyone involved.

---

\*Director, Centre for Computer-assisted Research Mathematics and its Applications (CARMA), University of Newcastle, Australia. Email: [jon.borwein@gmail.com](mailto:jon.borwein@gmail.com).

# You can always tell *Telstra*

## ...but you can't tell them much

*Telstra* agents are well trained to apologize sincerely for the information given by the previous agent. Often they have melodic Indian voices at which it is hard to project anger convincingly. They often seem to come from the Gold Coast.

In May, *Telstra* sales agents started calling our *Optus* phone number urging us to switch our home phone, *Foxtel* satellite television and *Optus* broadband to *Telstra*. “You will save a lot of money each month.” They continued “our network is much better. The process is so easy.” We were suspicious but eventually succumbed.

Before we knew it a contract arrived in the mail. Even before we had signed the agreement we got a call telling us the transfer had been done! Shocked, we phoned *Optus* and *Telstra* and eventually discovered (after being given several incompatible stories. This skill in providing compelling but false explanations we were to discover is part of *Telstra*'s secret training manual.) that only *Foxtel* had been switched. We breathed a deep sigh of relief, signed the agreement and went back to our lives.

During the World Cup we noticed our TV signal really was better. My guard was now down. In mid July, I called *Telstra* to arrange to also switch our phone and broadband. After several mishaps with *Telstra*'s automated phone access system, I mastered the sequence of numbers necessary to be steered to a human “consultant.” I was connected to a nice man in Perth who took all my details as he recorded my consent. As an internet user for nearly a quarter-century, I cautiously enquired about any breaks in service, compatibility issues and the like. “No worries, it will take at most a couple of hours” was the reassuring answer. “It is all done digitally.”

“When will it happen?” I asked. “Usually, ten working days, but I'll monitor this and see if we can speed it up.” *Telstra* consultants are apparently trained to offer to monitor and speed up. “You'll be able to check online.” Yes, if you can be online and if the stars

are well aligned.

## Good and bad numbers

Near the end of July, I got a phone call from a nice young *Telstra* lady. “Hello Jonathan, there is a problem with your order. You have a bad phone number.” I gulped, “What?” wondering if it was making rogue obscene phone calls while I was asleep. “It is on an exchange which only *Optus* uses.” I asked why this had only been found two weeks later since I had given the bad number to *Telstra* frequently. “You weren’t speaking to the right part of the company,” she admonished me sternly. I have discovered that detailed knowledge of how many “wrong parts” *Telstra* has (small and large business, home and away, pre and post paid, 1G, 2G and 3G, *Telstra* and *BigPond*, and on) is an important part of the highly professional service they offer. I imagine a story board with many arrows flashing up on the console each time one inadvertently gets to a “consultant” after pressing ‘3’ instead of ‘2’.

“No worries. We can get a phone crew out in two weeks.” Since I was leaving the country a week later, I urged the nice young lady to speed up the date. She said she would see what she could do and I was left yet again with *Telstra*’s background music for about 20 minutes. *Telstra* music is often very nice. Baroque music is a calming accompaniment to my own fugue state. Even if it is usually much louder than any agent’s speaking voice. *BigPond*’s loud techno-musak is not so nice. But if I turn it down and put the phone on speaker, I tend not to know if or when someone comes back on the line. *Telstra* consultants do not speak loudly. The musak has perhaps dulled their hearing.

Twenty minutes later she was back. This does not always happen. About one third of the time the line simply goes dead. Most frequently just after something good seems about to happen. Sometimes the automated system breaks and sends you back to the exchange. Once I got asked for a quality assessment of the most recent consultant. “Oh,

Good!” I awarded Raoul one out of five. Zero is not permissible. I was thanked warmly and asked if I wished to add anything. Marshalling my thoughts I replied “Yes.” The machine thanked me tersely and hung up.

I imagine that as courtesy, agents are taught to hang up if things are taking too long. After all, the agents are paid for the time they spend with you while they realize, considerately, that you are not. “Hi Jon. No worries, they will be out between eight am and noon on Monday August 2nd.” I thanked her and took down the order number. As instructed on Saturday, I entered my request for the broadband transfer into the appropriate website.

Monday, I stayed home from work to handle the phone changeover and to enjoy my new and speedier internet connection. In our house new technology (digital plumbing) is my job and old technology (real plumbing) is my wife’s. Noon came and passed. At one pm I called *Telstra* again. I was told no order had been placed but I was in luck and a crew would be round between two and six that afternoon.

At 9.00 am Tuesday, I called *Telstra*. I was told no such order had been placed. By now I was losing my cool just a little. The nice lady told me they had an order for the 13th of August. I tried to explain my story. She asked me to hold. She also came back in about 15 minutes, informed me the crew would be out on August 6th and that my internet could be switched over as soon as the phone had been. I thanked her but also left a mobile phone number so the crew could tell us when they were coming.

At 8.15 am Friday, *Telstra* called me. Our cell phone ran out of power before my wife had time to find out if the news was good or bad. Trembling, I called back. A nice older man had our phone working by nine. He checked our ethernet compatibility and pronounced all systems go. “All you have to do is tell *Telstra*.”

Undeterred I did just that. A nice young woman from Golden BC—just married and a firm friend because of shared speech patterns—assured me my travails were over. I was done and dusted. Overjoyed I signed up for a twenty-four month contract “with a great

rate.” When she finished she gave me the bad news. “Your phone will be working with 24 hours.” “It is working, we are speaking on it,” I squealed. A pause before “Yes, but we don’t know that,..., eh!” said in a fine BC accent. “And then it will take three working days for the ADSL to start working.”

Now I am a well-travelled computational scientist with a good head for numbers. Friday, for *Telstra* to decide my working phone is working. Saturday and Sunday are the well deserved weekend in Judeo-Christian countries. Since “24/7” means “9 to 4 five days a week a human may speak to you.” Hmn, Thursday for internet! I suggested perhaps the process could be expedited in light of the prior mishaps.

She went away. “I was able to do that. Bill will connect your broadband right now.” I spend an hour chatting with him while he entered his “codes.” A little later Bill announced. “All done. In a couple of hours you will be on line. It was one pm.

At 4.00 pm. I called *Telstra*. Imagine, all the button punching, birthdate repeating, name verifying. Plus the usual request for SIM numbers, linked phone numbers, serial and reference numbers and other things that I did or did not have, should have or could not have. But I digress. Eventually consultant two told me consultant three had told her that everything was fine. But the lab bloke had mis-spoken and things would take about 24 hours to ‘flush’ through the system. “Because you are coming from another provider,” she added helpfully. Which I had naively thought was the purpose of original *Telstra* solicitation.

It was now five pm Friday and nearly Shabbat. I thought God, with whom I have only a vague relationship, would like me to relax. So I thanked her and confirmed that life would be great by 4pm Saturday. Confirmation in hand, I rested. I certainly felt I had earned it. I had spent at least twelve hours on the phone with *Telstra* during the week; and another four with *Optus*—but that is another story. At the going consultancy rate that I have been told to charge I figured that *Telstra* owed me about \$4,000, but it was Shabbat and one is supposed to forgive.

At four pm Saturday. I called *Telstra*. Eventually Angel, “the most senior person working today in the Gold Coast,” came to the phone. Angel told me every one else was wrong, nothing could happen in less than three working days. I ranted and raged. I asked him if that would happen to Tony Abbott. He assured me it would. I was not really convinced, so I ranted a bit more. I told him that my life was over without access to my *dropbox*, *gmail*, and much more. That my family now lived in the “digital cloud” for better or worse. He pluckily stuck to his story. I adduced that more senior personages work on Fridays than Saturdays. So I told him that the least he could do was recompense me for my time. This led to his depositing a \$200 credit in my new *Telstra* phone account—I believe. As soon as I have a reliable broadband connection I mean to check online.

## **The best is yet to come**

I called my wife on her *Optus* mobile and asked her to buy two *Telstra* 3G modems so the family could have internet. Around 4.30pm Saturday she arrived back with them. I registered both modems with Joyce who made me feel really valued. We checked the operating system. Mine was *Windows Seven*. I had a *Turbo Modem*. “That is very good, Jon. That is compatible.” I don’t mind being called by first name when things are going well. I hate it when consultants who know nothing ask me if I am a first time user or tell me I don’t know a Gigapop from a Terabyte. I am not and I do.

We checked that my daughter’s *Windows XP* system was compatible too. By now *Telstra* had trained me well enough that I was only mildly discouraged when I was told it “could take *Telstra* up to twenty four hours” to give me access. Did I mention that my wife had to fill in as many forms for the purchase of the modems as for a passport? One can never be too careful.

Around six on Sunday we got back from a glorious day in the rain forest at the UNESCO world heritage site around the Barrington tops. Three-G coverage on my iPad

was non-existent outside of Gloucester; but we were there by choice so *Optus* should not be blamed. When we got home, my daughter seemed to be online but I was not. I could see *Telstra* and *Telstra* could talk to me, but I could not talk to anyone else on my modem. I went to bed early so as to be rested for another day talking to *Telstra*.

I tried calling at 8.00am Monday. That was very silly. After I went through the entire automated menu, I was send to the right department only to be told to “call back during normal business hours.” By this stage nothing seemed *normal*. I guessed that “normal” meant “after nine” and so it proved. Twice the system or a kind consultant disconnected me. Several times I was made to feel rather deficient for not having exactly the right number at my finger tips. By 10.00 am I was on my fourth attempt and third consultant. He assured me that the modem was incompatible without a software download. He seemed genuinely apologetic that someone else had told me otherwise. He was very convincing. Luckily, I had gotten hold of an old *Virgin* 3G modem and had recharged it earlier that morning. So I hung-up during the download and crossed my fingers.

Twenty minutes later, my now software-upgraded *Telstra* interface told me I had no 3G device. I tried uninstalling-reinstalling and rebooting. To no avail, I called *Telstra* again. By now you get the picture. You may have a headache as I did. I got upgraded to a level two consultant who seemed very confused about whether I was calling about Mobile or Home phone, Ethernet or WiFi. I have learned that *Telstra* wisely gives consultants no information about any client. That way security is assured and all bias is avoided. I clarified that I had indeed needed the software update. I was told I did. Foolishly I asked why the nice man on Saturday had told me otherwise and why the salesman in the store also did not know? “Jon, they are only authorized to install the software, they are not authorized to inform you of any need for upgrades” came the oracular answer. Soon after my connection to *Telstra* was enhanced by stirring martial music.

Ten minutes later, I gamely gave my full name and birthdate for the hundredth time (I had been using ‘0951’ for my birth year for a while but no one cared). I dutifully reported

my linked home phone number. Things were going swimmingly until Floie requested the serial number on my 3G modem. It has none. I offered the SIM, serial and reference numbers—a total of 40 digits in addition to phone numbers and birth-dates used before. She was unmollified. It is apparently nearly impossible to escalate to a level three technical consultant without such a number.

I was also concerned I might be suffering from sudden-onset macular degeneration so certain was she that my sleek white and blue inert modem had such a number. I politely suggested we invent a serial number. I suggested using ‘1-666.’ She thought that a good idea. She went off to consult more; she promised to call back if we got disconnected. By now I was routinely requesting that courtesy but it had never happened. I suspected that half the time consultants were hanging up when they got fed up. One nice man did give me his company number, D1234, so I could register a complaint if need be. That seemed to placate the gods of telephony as he was never dropped. Floie sounded very honest. She came back saying she been able to attach a number. I was ushered into the secret worlds of ‘level three’ service.

## **The light at the end of the tunnel**

James was immediately different. He sounded like he came from central casting at ‘Technology Central’. When I asked him to speak up he said the connection would be much better if he called back in five minutes after scoping things out. He actually did, and it really was. James asked proper questions. I gave concise answers. It turned out that I had been told to download software which held no driver for my modem. The third thing we tried involved yet another complete uninstall-reinstall-and restart sequence. Which with *Windows* is not a quick process. That done, the modem groaned for a while and turned blue. The dialog box complained for a while and turned green. I opened a webpage. I thanked James who was at pains to point out that he had done only “level one trouble

shooting.” I replied that I was well aware of that and that if I had had confidence in what the issue was I would have fixed it myself. We parted most amicably.

I was briefly in heaven until I realized that all of this was to fix problems that had arisen in an attempt to avoid problems while my big problem with my ethernet was fixed. Still there were now only two working days to wait until I found if I had told *Telstra* the right thing. Progress.

Tuesday morning, I was supposed to skype colleagues in Vancouver. After a warm bath I switched on the modem and it quickly told me I was connected. Life was back to normal. Except for one annoying detail: I had no connectivity. Determined to deal with this myself, I clicked the **charge** link in the *Telstra tools* menu. It replied “unknown application.” Just to be safe, I gave myself a one year *Telstra* recharge using my reliable if scruffy old *Virgin* modem. This because I knew no way to tell if I had used up the 225Mb—or 2Gb depending which advert I read—that *Telstra* generously sold with the modem. To no avail. Especially as my assigned *BigPond* user name and password appeared not not work. The nice Canadian girl had told me on Friday that my preferred seven symbol password was too long and had given me an easier five symbol one. I tried various plausible alternatives and the system wisely locked me out.

It was still too early to tell *Telstra*. By now I was getting dizzy swapping in and out modems as I tried to use *Telstra*’s online help without help from *Telstra*. My NEXTT modem now told me I had credit of \$151.00 but it still would not do anything else. Cruising for information I found <http://forums.whirlpool.net.au/furlorum-replies-archive.cfm/1098510.html> whose author wrote “Since I’ve got my *Telstra* Prepaid Wireless Broadband \$149 kit, I’ve been having the most excruciatingly frustrating telco experience ever.” It seemed pretty bad but not really competitive with my current travail.

At 9.05am, Drew checked all my vital signs and numbers and confirmed I had credit. He said to hold the line. He would be back. I held the line. At 9.10am a consultant called Frank said “Good morning! This is *Telstra* “How may I help you?” Much wiser now I

calmly replied “Please give me a ‘level three’ technician.” To my surprise this worked. At 9.11am a level three, Sophie, came on the line. She soon told me she would check things out and call back in five minutes. We carefully validated my new *Telstra* landline number. Apparently, how ever many times you give them this linked number, *Telstra* scrupulously never records this critical piece of information. I assume this is something to do with Australian privacy laws. Good on you, *Telstra*!

It is now 9.42am. I am eagerly awaiting Sophie’s call.

It is now 9.54am. I have decide Sophie doesn’t like me. I get up the courage to tell *Telstra*. I am asked several times for my service number. I am repeatedly asked for my full name. For Anna, I spell my name “JPQthan” . I say my middle name is “Desdemona.” I am thanked politely. I beg to be put in touch with a level three. She demurs. Just please explain my problem. I realize yesterday was another kinder kingdom. I beg some more. She relents. The stirring techno-musak restarts. It is now 10.08am.

I no longer have a job ... *I am Alice in a Telstra rabbit hole*. I have forgotten why I bought the *Telstra* modem which now has begun to resemble a sleek white whale.

Bill comes to the phone. “How may I help you. “Is this about your mobile phone? “No,” I started. The martial music surged back. I was about to hang up when I heard “Hello, how may I help you. This is Kathy.” I asked for her employee number several times. I guess she was not senior enough to have been given one yet. I made my dream of a level three consultant clear. She replied “ Do you want a level two?”. I remade my request. She seemed to acquiesce. So I implored her not to put the music back on. The musak surged back.

The door bell rings. I take the phone with me and sign for a courier package. Back at my desk I open it. It contains two glossy pages; one welcoming me to *BigPond*. and one offering ten free DVD rentals when I sign up for another of the “great Telstra offers” I was now privileged to have access to. No CD, no useful information. Couriered!

Kathy comes back. I am somberly informed that no level three assistance is *ever*

provided for prepaid broadband. Shangri la is vanished. I utter the phrase ‘personal accountability’ and finally extract her employee number. I learn that that—according to her—the sum total of records in my file—there actually is one—is that I “had trouble with the internet on Monday.” I am transferred to a level two.

Inaudible voices come on the line. I beg them to call me back. I am asked for my *Telstra* number again. Nothing happens.

## When in doubt complain

It is now 10.31am. I reconceptualise my situation. I google “Telstra, complaints.” My *Virgin* modem brings up a web page with details on how to send *Telstra* a compliment or a complaint. I finally beat the automated system and get to a young lady who seems quite Clintonesque in her ability to feel my pain. She passes me to Michelle Nilsson, a team leader on the *Telstra team*. She seems very nice and equally Clintonesque. It takes me twenty minutes to paraphrase my woes. She promises to initiate a formal complaint and assures me that despite previous assertions all the earlier agents (an odd word when no action has ever resulted) could see my history. Well maybe ...

At 11.00am the line goes dead. But I am determined to remain resolute and upbeat. I am sure Michelle will call back and I am about to email her my tale. I warm up my *Virgin* modem. My billable time expended now exceeds \$5,000. It is 11.25am.

At 11.45am, I adduce Michelle feels her job is done. I call the *Telstra* number again. I follow the instruction to just say “complaint”. I say “COMPLAINT, COMPLAINT, COMPLAINT.” My friend Jan recommends that one “swear at the bloody things.” I manage to resist the impulse. Unmoved the automatic lady refuses to proceed until I confess that my phone is not working and tell her the phone number I am having a problem with. That gets me routed to a nice man “less senior than Michelle.”

He tells me something no one else saw fit to mention “*Telstra* is having router prob-

lems today.” This is clearly on a “need to know” basis only and not safe to circulate to consultants. Had I been told this I would have asked “when should I anticipate them being fixed?” and gone back to work. He assures me I have had my complaint recorded and expedited. Further enquiry indicates that being expedited has no bearing on when or if I will ever have internet access. Moreover, *BigPond*’s authoritative webpage assures me that there are no known interruptions of service. Whom to believe? Everyone sounds sincere, some even sound convincing. *Everything* I am told is contradicted later.

I suggest that surely ‘expediting’ could also result in my ethernet connection being made active now. I ask him to see this can be done. After all we live in a digital age of what Lawrence Lessig calls “west coast code.” Only one entry in one relational data-base stands between me and Nirvana.

For the first time it is I not *Telstra* who hangs up.

It is now 5.25 pm on Tuesday. There is nothing new to report. How could there be? *Telstra* wisely believes in listening but not in responding. They have recorded my interactions so as to improve their service at least a dozen times. It is more than a little droll to be experiencing this on the day Tony Abbott has officially promised the National Broadband Network to the private sector. We will at best end up with a “no-upload lots of unwanted download” network. I consider returning my Rhodes Scholarship (Jesus College and Ontario, 1971). My faithful little *Virgin* modem keeps humming. I like Richard Branson.

## **Back to Tech Support**

It is now 9.40am on Wednesday August 11th. Fifteen minutes ago, I tried to speak to Michelle. This proves impossible. I am asked various questions. I think the nice lady (they are all nice) has sent an email to Michelle, direct contact being impossible for security or efficiency reasons. I am promised a call back. I do not believe it. My wife and daughter

are sure *Telstra* is punishing me for complaining; I wish I thought them that organized.

So I call tech support. I think I have said the right thing when I answer “ADSL” but clearly not because I arrive at a *Macintosh* support desk—as eventually becomes clear. Minor miracles occur when the next man, Richard, answers my question as to when I should expect my ADSL line to function. Richard replies, “That would be 8.00 am on August 11th.” I point out that 8.00 am on August 11th was nearly two hours ago. We begin to trouble shoot. At 10.12am I have connectivity at least in *Explorer*.

Bliss. Richard has promised to call if the line is interrupted. So I ask him to fix my *Turbo* problem. He asks me to switch off my ADSL modem. That was a really bad idea. A very authoritative automated lady voice breaks in and tells me she is from *Telstra Business* and that my call may be recorded “for coaching and quality purposes.” God knows I need more coaching. When I get off the floor, I reboot and as I feared I no longer have live ADSL.

At 10.30am Richard has not called back. I figure out that level ones do not have phones; or if they do are not authorized to use them. So I do my own trouble shooting, to no avail. I am right back where I was at 8.00am. I call *Telstra* again. At 10.55am, Joseph explains that I need a *yellow* ethernet cable. I’m now willing to try anything so I rush out to my local store and come back with two new short *blue* ethernet cables. Of course it makes no difference. At least my cabling will be neater.

It is now nearly noon. Maybe it will all be working when I get home tonight.

I get home at 7.21pm. My wife had been told various other completely bogus things by several more highly skilled *Telstra* consultants. One had explained it was a problem with my *Belkin* WiFi router which I have connected to the system to reduce complexity; another that I had never been given *BigPond* account; a third that my *Optus* login name would not work. She was so angry she had written CALM in big letters on my note pad. A fourth had tried to get me to ping my home modem from work. I refused and hung up.

Nothing is working yet.

Just before midnight, tired of murder mysteries, I try my NEXTG *Turbo* modem again. I try several reboots and “trouble shoots.” I detach all other devices. A little after midnight my modem finally comes to life. I cruise the web, answer email and open an ftp client. I exit and restart. It really seems to work! What an awesome company *Telstra* is. We bought an off-the-shelf plug and play product from *JB HiFi* on Saturday and it only took five days to make it work. Now I only have my original *Telstra* problem to work with—and the small matter of my botched *BigPond* account.

I go to bed. There is no fist pumping. After all *Telstra* has teased me with service before. We shall see in the morrow. At 6.45 am Thursday, I fire up my modem. After refusing to do anything for a few minutes, it starts. A few minutes later I have downloads. A few minutes yet later I discover that 2MB of upload appears to be my quota for the day. So I can not answer my daily sea of email. I read the *New York Times* instead. Apparently Lucy ate meat and used tools. Would she have liked the taste of *Telstra* level one consultants?

At 7.10am Thursday, I disconnect and reconnect my modem. I discover the fault was with *gmail*. This is the one place I sympathize with all tech consultants. Problems never come alone. I upload the current version of this saga to my *Math Drudge* blog at [www.experimentalmath.info](http://www.experimentalmath.info). My email done, I do some work.

At 8.15am I return to the web. I have discovered that in the *Telstra* handbook “Internet Explorer” is a synonym for “web browser.” So when *Chrome* does not function I open *Explorer*—which I hate. Once again I have only minimal connectivity on the *Telstra* turbo modem. What sins I must have to expiate!

At 8.25am I decide that yet again I must tell *Telstra*. I asked the consultant to slowly spell my login and discover my user name is *jbrowein*. To correct that would mean cancelling our service and setting up a new account—and surprise, surprise that “will take three working days” and ensure no service before Wednesday (some Wednesday, any Wednesday?). We are beyond absurd. I no longer care that my first name is misrecorded

as *Jonathon*. I barely notice my *Turbo* modem is working again. I finally am transferred to a technician who transfers me to another technician. It is 8.50am. That awful throbbing *BigPond* music returns. At 9.05am the automated voice asks me to rate my service. I tell them they are “a horrid, no good, nasty, rotten company.”

David, my next *BigPond* tech-buddy is very nice. He gives me his employee number. Of course, he can only do his bit. He is in Manilla. He is very competent and is the first person to try to reset my *Optus* modem. By 9.45am it seems clear my *Optus* modem is not behaving. David is upset and clearly wants to fix things.

And then. *Telstra*'s automated phone system breaks in again.... By now, dear reader, if against all odds you are still reading, any *Telstra* agent is being yelled at pretty quickly. I do not really mind they are compelled to get all my details and are trained to ignore anything I say. I really do mind that they can never help.

## The new normal

I am finally domesticated. I will be a nice person. I shall wait for the *Telstra* modem to arrive. I shall pray that the 3G modem functions until then. I will sacrifice a goat or two to ensure things things go smoothly.

But I still want a working *BigPond* account in the right name. I am scared that without that—like *Charlie on the MTA* in the old folk song—I will be lost forever in the *Telstra* databases. Only my billing details will be right, they already are.

With considerable difficulty, I discover that I have a *service request* number—*Telstra* speak for complaint number—and a 1-800 number to call. Odd that no one told me. Eric persuades me I have to live with my new name. The alternative is much worse. I tell Mrs **Browein**. When the phone goes dead I call back and eventually get to another case agent.

She refuses to tell me Eric's last name. She says they are not allowed to divulge such sensitive information. “Security, thy name is *Telstra*.” I extract her employee number as

she promises to find out when my modem will arrive and if my current name and password should be expected to work. I am promised a call back today. She takes a mobile number as well.

It is 11.40am Thursday and it is time to go back to my old job at the Uni. I have found a fine website with a list of places to send complaints about *Telstra*. We FAX copies of this story to the CEO, the ombudsman and much else. My colleagues ask “Why bother?” I reply they should wait and see. By 6pm there has been no call back. No surprise there—and some relief—as I think I have learned all there is to learn about how to talk to *Telstra*.

At 10.30am Friday. I am called by *Telstra* head office—or something of that kind. Words fail Louise as she tries to describe my experience. My FAX has been read, I have been assigned a senior case manager who I am assured “will call Monday,” a slight pause, ...“or early Tuesday.”

## Postscript

**C is for Chesterfield**, Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of (1694-1773). He agreed to be patron of the dictionary but provided no assistance during the 10 years it took to produce. His congratulations to Johnson on the dictionary’s publication earned him a magisterial rebuke from the lexicographer: ‘*Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help?*’<sup>1</sup>

On Saturday at 1.35pm I completed a successful talk with my new patron, *Telstra*. I was able to access my account and change my password—after having it reset by *BigPond*. By my new and reduced criteria, this was a very smooth interaction; even if the wording

---

<sup>1</sup>[www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-az-of-dr-johnsons-dictionary-530615.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-az-of-dr-johnsons-dictionary-530615.html)

used on the website could use some attention. Small successes make me unreasonably pleased now.

On Monday 16th at noon, I notice that *Telstra* has been recording usage on my account over the past few days. The conclusion is clear. There is no problem from the *Telstra* network to my modem—and there was none with my *Optus* modem prior to *Telstra*'s arrival. So I ping it using the correct *Optus* address and set my login to my correct-incorrect name and my password. Everything works. Thank you, *Telstra*. Its been nice talking to you.

On Friday the 20th. I comment to Mrs Browein that no modem has arrived and that I suspect none was ever ordered despite several “confirmations” from *Telstra*. On Monday 23rd, Eric confirms this. He offers me two equally attractive options. Wait two weeks or buy one and I will be reimbursed if I send the invoice. He could not tell my adult daughter that on Friday for security reasons. He lectures me when I am irate: I still clearly need more coaching. I am so tired of talking to *Telstra*. I think I asked him to order the modem.