

MultiChoice... What choice?

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2 Apr 2014

Nasionale Pers today is not like the beast it used to be in the 1980s when I worked at its Cape Town headquarters. Back then, Naspers was a crypto-fascist newspaper and magazine behemoth that hid its apartheid sympathies behind a vaguely verligte public face, doing its best to reflect a supposedly more enlightened Cape Afrikaner heritage.



Why is the decoder so difficult to set up?
(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

A miracle and wonder, then, to behold its present guise as a supranational multimedia octopus. You will find the giant mollusc's suckers everywhere in emerging markets. Beyond sub-Saharan Africa, Naspers is in China, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, Dubai and India. If you want to catch a rugby or cricket match on a Greek island, say, you would watch a Naspers-backed channel.

It's a hardware issue

Its internet and e-commerce operations are by far the biggest money-spinners. Print and pay-TV in South Africa are legacy assets. Print is being ground down with minimal investment; the company is not exactly throwing sand in the gearbox, but it provides precious little grease.

Pay-TV business MultiChoice has run as a near-monopoly for 22 years. It provides an annuity stream investors adore, but I am not convinced you could place DStv decoder owners among the happiest in the land. I speak from experience.

There is nothing wrong with its "bouquet" of channels, or even the subscription fee. It's the hardware.

Why all the wires? I could ask Altech why their verk*kte decoders are so damn difficult to get working without the help of a

registered service provider or a child. But I won't. I want to whinge about MultiChoice, whose put-upon service division has to placate the likes of me.

A bad joke

The call centre is a joke, so if your decoder gives in your only option, as a Joburger, is to trek to Randburg and open your heart to a clerk.

They have been schooled to be polite, even in the face of volcanic exasperation. Usually your decoder is not fixable (the wretched wires don't connect properly), so they offer you a reconditioned one for R500. I have gone through five of the things in the past year, but not once did my friendly clerk offer a trade-in and upgrade to the new Explora model.

On my second-to-last visit to Randburg, I asked if I could make a complaint. My dear clerk waved a hand to a terminal in the corner, which really cheered me up. Eventually a boss-type chap appeared, and committed the wickedest sin of all. He blamed the firm that reconditions the machines, making his problem mine.

So last week I gave up and asked to buy a new decoder. Then MultiChoice refused to accept my Diners Club card.

I hissed out and bought an Explora at Game for R150 less than I would have paid at the MultiChoice service centre.

Happy ending? Not so much. The blasted thing now requires a fancy new satellite dish. You want a stock tip? Sell Naspers.

Source: Business Times, via I-Net Bridge

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