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Comcast admits its policies are responsible for customer harassment

"It was painful to listen to this call."


By Jacob Kastrenakes | @jake_k | Jul 22, 2014, 12:24pm EDT

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Comcast plans to reexamine the way it tries to keep subscribers from leaving its service, after a [nightmarish call with one customer](#) went viral last week and led to an outpouring of criticism. The recorded call included eight minutes of what Comcast calls a "Retention" agent attempting to argue a customer down from leaving, and Comcast now admits that much of this aggressive behavior was its own fault. "The agent on this call did a lot of what we trained him and paid him ... to do," Dave Watson, Comcast's chief operating officer, writes in an internal letter that was published Monday morning, [leaked to Consumerist](#), and [verified by Ars Technica](#).

As *The Verge*'s Adrienne Jeffries [reported last week](#), the agent's startling obstinacy was right in line with the ways in which Comcast motivates these employees — namely, having their pay rely on how many customers they lose and how many they keep from leaving. In its internal letter, Comcast doesn't say exactly what measures it will take to prevent situations like this in the future, and it certainly won't be wholly ending the "retention" practice — "He tried to save a customer, and that's important," Watson writes.

But Watson does say that how retention calls are made will be examined. "We will review our training programs, we will refresh our manager on coaching for quality, and we will take a look at our incentives to ensure we are rewarding employees for the right behaviors," Watson writes. "We can, and will, do better." That final item, reviewing how Comcast motivates its retention employees, will likely be a critical one to address before attitudes like the one demonstrated in last week's call disappear, and clearly Comcast knows there's an issue: "It was painful to listen to this call," Watson writes, "and I am not surprised that we have been criticized for it."

You can read the full memo below, [via Consumerist](#).

A Message From Dave Watson,
July 21, 2014

You probably know that there has been a fair amount of media attention about a recording of a phone call between one of our Customer Account Executives (CAEs) and a Comcast customer. The call went viral on social media and generated news headlines. We have apologized to the customer privately and publicly on Comcast Voices, making it clear that we are embarrassed by the tone of the call and the lack of sensitivity to the customer's desire to discontinue service.

I'd like to give you my thoughts on the situation.

First, let me say that while I regret that this incident occurred, the experience that this customer had is not representative of the good work that our employees are doing. We have tens of thousands of incredibly talented and passionate people interacting with our customers every day, who are respectful, courteous and resourceful.

That said, it was painful to listen to this call, and I am not surprised that we have been criticized for it. Respecting our customers is fundamental, and we fell short in this instance. I know these Retention calls are tough, and I have tremendous admiration for our Retention professionals, who make it easy for customers to choose to stay with Comcast. We have a Retention queue because we believe in our products, and because we offer a great value when customers have the right facts to choose the package that works best for them. If a customer is not fully aware of what the product offers, we ask the Retention agent to educate the customer and work with them to find the right solution.

The agent on this call did a lot of what we trained him and paid him — and thousands of other Retention agents — to do. He tried to save a customer, and that's important, but the act of saving a customer must always be handled with the utmost respect. This situation has caused us to reexamine how we do some things to make sure that each and every one of us — from leadership to the front line — understands the balance between selling and listening. And that a great sales organization always listens to the customer, first and foremost.

When the company has moments like these, we use them as an opportunity to get better, and that's what we're going to do. We will review our training programs, we will refresh our manager on coaching for quality, and we will take a look at our incentives to ensure we are rewarding employees for the right behaviors. We can, and will, do better.

Thank you for your support, and many thanks to the thousands of exceptional employees all around the country who work so hard to deliver a great customer experience every day. I am confident that together we will continue to improve the experience, one customer at a time.

Dave Watson
Chief Operating Officer, Comcast Cable

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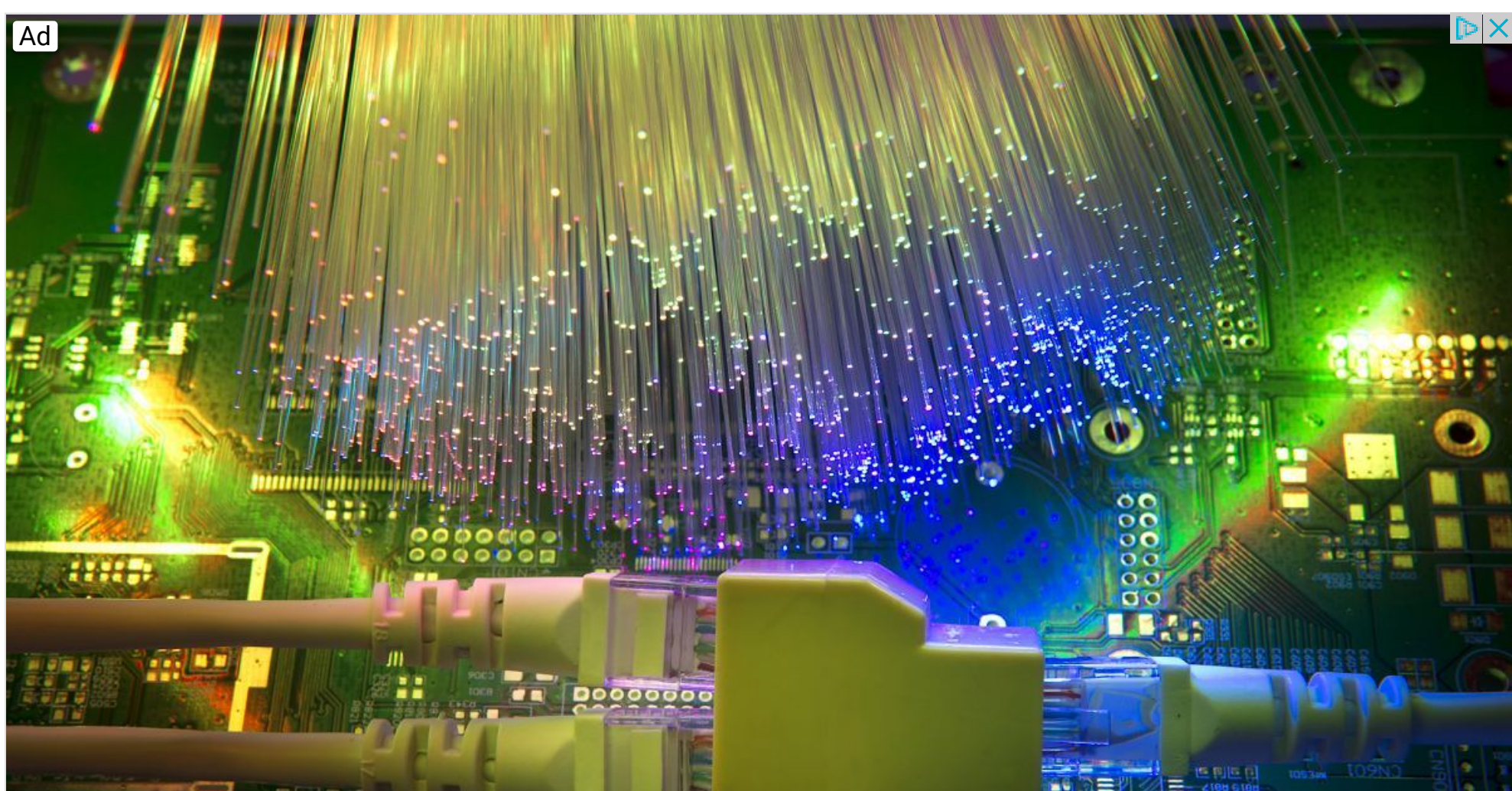
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