

(NO LOGO THIS TIME)

From The Verge:

Comcast is unleashing its PR machine to try to manage the controversy around its home broadband data caps. After recently **expanding its "trial" 300GB monthly data cap** in several cities around the Southeastern US, it looks like public relations circulated a memo to customer service representatives telling them how to discuss the new plans. That memo has now reportedly leaked online, **courtesy of a Comcast employee on Reddit**.

In it, Comcast admits what many have long suspected: its data caps have nothing to do with network congestion. In a section on best practices when explaining why Comcast is expanding its data caps, representatives are told [emphasis added]:

Do say: *"Fairness and providing a more flexible policy to our customers."*

Don't say: *"The program is about congestion management."* (It is not.)

Of course, "fairness" doesn't quite explain it, either. If data caps don't improve network reliability or performance, why does Comcast now see the need to charge customers more for the same data they've been using for years? Since there's such scarce competition in the US cable industry, the answer is likely quite simple: because Comcast can.

Under the new plans, depending on region, customers can opt to pay **an extra \$30 to \$35 per month to unlock unlimited internet access**. Subscribers who don't sign up for such a plan will automatically be charged \$10 for an additional 50GB if they exceed their limit. Caps start at 300GB for standard internet plans, while they max at 600GB for the company's "Extreme" tier.

The timing is also particularly opportune: while the vast majority of Comcast customers currently use less than 300GB per month, internet usage is set to drastically increase as video streaming (especially in 4K) becomes more and more central to home entertainment. This allows Comcast to set the policy without ruffling too many feathers, and by the time users need those 300GB, the company hopes, it'll just be standard to pay for more data. [Our own Todd Smith hit that one on the head.]

Oh, and Comcast PR would prefer if you didn't call it a data cap — since you can pay more to bypass the 300GB limit, it's a "data usage plan" like those ones your wireless carrier charges you for. Comcast maintains in the documentation that "we do not limit a customer's use of the internet in any way at or above 300GB" since it no longer throttles its users. However, that only makes sense if you don't count surcharges and fees as limiting your internet experience.

The company's also spinning the trial 300GB cap somehow as a positive. Service reps, according to the leaked document, are told to say that "Customers in trial markets had their data usage plan increased to 300GB." Since subscribers in non-trial markets aren't getting charged at all for extra data, that might seem

nonsensical, but Comcast has it figured out on a technicality. See, in officially-sanctioned PR-speak, customers in non-trial markets don't have unlimited data, they "have a 250GB data usage plan, although we are not currently enforcing this policy."

There are also a few other interesting details in the leaked documents, including the company's policy for dealing with customers who use certain buzzwords that Comcast doesn't like. If a customer utters the words "net neutrality," or dares to ask about what is and isn't counted under the data cap, they'll get transferred to a different customer service team. Calls will also be escalated if customers make "observations about how Xfinity services are or are not counted relative to third party services." Representatives are instructed "not address these items with the customer" according to the documentation.

Historically, Comcast's own internet streaming services, like its Xfinity app for Xbox, **have not counted against caps**, while competing services like Netflix do. Data caps aren't new for Comcast, though they are rare at other major US cable companies. In 2012, the company **announced that it was dropping its 250GB hard data cap** on home broadband customers. Comcast said at the time that the caps would eventually be replaced with the system that is now being more widely trialled around the country.

Disclosure: Comcast is a minority investor in Vox Media, The Verge's parent company

I wonder if Apple and other providers of streaming content will have anything to say about this?

According to the History Channel Apple's iCloud is an alien plot to capture human data. I guess that would have to include all the other "Cloud" products as well.