



## AT&T U-verse giving television viewers another service option

By ASHLEY RUEFF - H&R Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, September 14, 2009 6:50 pm

DECATUR ; -Television cable and satellite companies have a new competitor in Central Illinois.

AT&T rolled out its U-verse television service to the area in late June, giving local residents another option when it comes to television.

Comcast has been the only game in town for sometime for customers who don't want satellite. But after a state law was passed in 2007 allowing a statewide franchise, AT&T has had an easier time of expanding its television services.

Instead of getting approval from each city to provide its television services to the area, AT&T sought permission on the state level, allowing them to spread throughout the state more quickly.

"The law is bringing competition to cable faster for more consumers," said Eric Robinson, an AT&T legislative spokesman. The U-verse package is available in 290 communities in Illinois, he said.

AT&T doesn't call their television system cable because the service is actually provided through an Internet Protocol, or IP network, instead of the coaxial cable used by Comcast.

As soon as Decatur resident Robert Rosetto, heard about the new option, he switched.

"I was just very tired of Comcast," said the 79-year-old. "They increased the price, but they sure didn't increase what they were putting out."

Rosetto said he gets more channels, more features and better quality with AT&T, and for him it is worth paying a little more.

"I'm paying maybe \$7 more a month, and I'm much more satisfied," he said.

The AT&T service isn't available everywhere in Decatur because they're still working on installing their technology, said Amanda Harris, AT&T U-verse representative for Illinois. She said customers have to call to see if it is available in their area.

Some of the U-verse features from AT&T include DVRs that can record four different shows at once and then play them back on any television in the house. However, each television requires a box, and only the first one is free.

If customers also buy their Internet and phone services from AT&T, then there are other features that allow the different services to work together.

Rich Ruggiero, Comcast regional vice president for communications and public affairs, said Comcast is familiar with the competition.

"Comcast competes every day across all three of our product lines with a variety of different providers," he said. □;"Overwhelmingly, people in the Decatur area and across Illinois are choosing Comcast for all of their communications and entertainment needs because we deliver a superior suite of products for a great value over one converged fiber-rich network, with the convenience of one bill. The phone company is just trying to catch up to where we are today."

They've already been competing with AT&T home phone and Internet services in Decatur.

"We're used to competition because we've faced it for a long time," he said.

When asked about frequent complaints about poor customer service in Decatur, Ruggiero said Comcast has increased its staff by nearly 19 percent in Illinois since they took over some Insight areas in early 2008.

Comcast has a franchise agreement with the city of Decatur to provide service to the community, which requires them to pay a fee to the city of five percent of their customer's bills, said city manager Ryan McCrady. That amounts totals about \$1 million a year.

He said the city is eligible to apply the same franchise fee to AT&T for their television services, but he is unsure if and when the city council will take up the issue.

Rosie Doore a Comcast customer from Decatur, said she hopes a little more competition in town will help drive prices down. She thinks her cable bill is too high, but doesn't have any plans to switch to AT&T for television, although AT&T currently provides her phone services.

"I'm not crazy about them either," she said.

Bryan McDaniel, with the Citizens Utility Board, said most people think cable prices are too high, and it's yet to be seen if AT&T's newest service will help drive down prices because of competition.

"Sometimes a duopoly can be as bad as a monopoly," he said. "But it's a step in the right direction. We're taking a wait and see approach."

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