



BY BRIAN DIPERT, SENIOR TECHNICAL EDITOR

## Canceling Sirius: so frustrating, it made me furious

**T**ough economic times understandably encourage subscription-service companies to do their utmost to hold onto customers. Sometimes, they achieve this goal by making the service too tempting to discard, offering free months, free extras, and other perks. And sometimes, unfortunately, they achieve this goal by making the cancellation too difficult to accomplish. America Online ([www.aol.com](http://www.aol.com)), for example, has

gotten into plenty of legal trouble in recent years for such despicable behavior. And, if my experience and that of other frustrated online activists indicates a general trend, beleaguered Sirius Satellite Radio ([www.sirius.com](http://www.sirius.com)) is due for some regulatory attention, too.

I've been a Sirius subscriber since October 2004, but I've never listened to the service much in my car, in no small part because, as a home-based worker, I don't have a daily office commute. Conversely, I've made regular use of the Sirius Online streaming music service, specifically the 32-kbps configuration that comes with my subscription. However, in February, I received an e-mail warning me that free online access would end by March 11 if I didn't "renew now," even though my subscription was active through later that month. Whenever I launched the Sirius Online player, pop-up windows would echo that warning, indicating that, unless I renewed early—for a one-, two-, or three-year term—my only streaming option after March 11 would be an incremental-cost, albeit higher-bit-rate, service variant.

Frankly, I've been listening to Sirius Online less and less with the passage

of time. I've got a formidable library of network-stored music ripped from CDs. My Microsoft ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)) Zune subscription-music service, which includes 128 streamed channels, provides additional music content. Plenty of other low-cost or free online streamed-music sources, such as Pandora ([www.pandora.com](http://www.pandora.com)), are also available. And I have little confidence that Sirius will still be a viable business entity a year from now, much less two or three years. So, I decided to cancel my Sirius service before the cutoff date.

While trying to perform what should have been a simple task, I encountered several annoying barriers. First, Sirius provided no online or e-mail option for service cancellation or, for that matter, even automatic-renewal cancellation. The only way to cancel is to contact customer service by the phone number the company publishes on its Web site. When I tried that option, I encountered a Byzantine automated-menu system and lengthy hold delays followed by hang-ups. After my second disconnection experience, I checked out a discussion thread at SiriusBuzz.com (<http://siriusbuzz.com/forum/showthread.php?t=228>). From that experience, I learned that, even if I had gotten through to a human, that

person would have told me to dial a different, unpublished number dedicated to cancellation requests. So, for my third cancel-by-phone attempt, I tried this alternative number instead.

After yet another wait of more than a half-hour, I reached someone. However, after providing my name, phone number, mailing address, and e-mail address and after firmly and repeatedly stating that I wanted to cancel my service, the person on the line, having repeatedly tried to persuade me otherwise, put me on hold. In 10 minutes, another person got on the phone. Again, I provided my name, phone number, mailing address, and e-mail address. This person again asked me several times if I was sure I wanted to cancel my service. Eventually, the cancellation went through, but it would not become effective for more than two weeks. The customer-support person claimed that she couldn't process an early-termination request. Though I doubted her sincerity, I decided against enduring even more delay and frustration just for a two-plus-weeks'-worth credit on my bill.

The experience bolsters my conviction that Sirius is in a fiscal last-gasp situation. Even though other folks in my shoes might have given up, thereby allowing Sirius to retain subscribers in the short term, the company's behavior will do only further harm to its long-term viability. It reminds me of those Internet companies that sign up my e-mail address for newsletters, promotional messages, and the like and then refuse to honor my requests to unsubscribe. But when the short term looks so grim, I guess Sirius doesn't have the luxury of caring about the long term. Caveat emptor, folks.**EDN**

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