

AT&T fails the test when it comes to public broadcasting

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Eric Gwinn's July 22 comparison of AT&T and Comcast in the article "Rock em, sock 'em TV providers" fails to point out how local community programs on public, educational and governmental (PEG) access channels are handled on the systems of these two providers.

Loyola University's live, interactive COUNTDOWN program has appeared on Chicago's community station, Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV,) for 19 years, engaging tens of thousands of students every school year. COUNTDOWN makes math "work" by capitalizing on the one on one relationship a student viewer has with television. Children in homes throughout Chicago that subscribe to Comcast, RCN or WOW can see CAN TV as easily as they can see channels 2, 5, 7 and 9.

AT&T is the first company to receive an Illinois statewide license to enter the multi-billion dollar television business. Doing business in Illinois means providing public access channels in the same way as commercial channels: with equivalent functionality and quality.

AT&T's planned system for PEG programs like COUNTDOWN fails the test by removing those programs from its television line-up. PEG programs will be hard to find, channel surfing between commercial channels and PEG channels won't work, and channel listings for programs like COUNTDOWN will disappear. It doesn't take an educator to know that "out of sight" can easily become "out of mind."

Educational programmers in states that already have AT&T's PEG system are experiencing problems such as the lack of support for closed captioning or second audio programs for foreign language speakers. These deficiencies in AT&T's system impair the educational experience.

No telecommunications provider operating under Illinois' state video franchise law should be permitted to redefine what programming is important for the local community. The Illinois legislature has made that clear by approving a law with protections for PEG programs like COUNTDOWN. AT&T needs to follow the law. Our schoolchildren are relying on it.

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