

Paying with cash

by BRIAN LOCKHART

?Cash only please.?

You may have seen that sign when entering local business recently after a service disruption caused Interac terminals in many stores to stop working.

It wasn't a big deal for me. I always keep a small stash of cash in a wallet just in case something like this happens or if I buy something at a place that doesn't have debit ? like a roadside food truck, many of whom take cash only.

Apparently it was a big deal for many businesses who do most of their transactions on debit, like grocery stores or other places that do a high volume. That's just a sign of the times in our nearly cashless society.

Those places were left scrambling and trying to find enough cash to make sure their customers were taken care of. I would imagine the banks and the armoured car companies were busy that day.

The disruption was country-wide, although Ontario was the most affected by the outage, with Quebec having a lot of problems and other provinces having disruptions on a smaller scale.

A failure at Rogers Communications was behind the disruption.

A Rogers spokesperson later explained it as ?a system failure following a maintenance update in our core network, which cause some of our routers to malfunction early Friday morning.?

I have Rogers cable television at home. Sure enough, I got a blank screen when I turned the TV on as a test. It wasn't a big deal to me at all, since I pretty much stopped watching television around 20 years ago. I watch maybe one-half hour per day, and I limit that to either The Big Bang Theory, Seinfeld, or the occasional riveting episode of Corner Gas.

Although I did see some angry posts on Facebook from people who were pretty upset at not being able to watch the latest episode of The Real Housewives of some city.

While for most, the disruption in service was mostly an annoyance, police did issue a warning about calling 911 in an emergency if you are part of the Rogers network, and suggested you find a land line.

I had no idea that Rogers was so heavily involved in communications around the country, mostly because I never gave it much thought. I always assumed their business was cable television, internet, and telephones, but their systems are apparently a lot larger than I, and I think a lot of people may now realize just how far Rogers has their hooks into communications in the province.

So, things are back up and running. I'm sure the people who work with and fix these types of things were sweating bullets at the time when they realized their system had placed a good deal of communications across the country in jeopardy.

I'm sure they are already working on safeguards for the future so this won't happen again.

The question I have is why were all the services interrupted at the same time? Why would cable television, something that comes to your home through a cable, be interrupted at the same time that a mobile phone signal went down?

I guess I don't know enough about the tech world to really criticize, but it seems to me, having those things run separately might be a

good idea.

This annoyance in our daily lives also highlighted the fact how important communications are in our society and how easily a group with nefarious intentions could cause serious problems.

Banks and financial institutions were affected, but I had no problem getting cash from the Instateller. But what if those systems had been disrupted as well? I don't think most merchants would have been open to accepting a chicken or an old baseball card in trade for their merchandise because you couldn't get cash from the machine.

Rogers Communications has promised to reimburse their customers for the loss of service by crediting their bill. For me, I have only basic cable, so I figure they will credit me about \$2 for my day of not being able to watch television. I'm not too worried ? I've had Rogers service for over 20 years and this was the first time my cable wasn't working, so that's a pretty good track record.

The situation did highlight how important communication is in our society and how much modern commerce relies on pressing buttons and transferring funds through the digital world and what a disaster it would be if the situation went on for a longer period of time.