Buyer Beware: Future-proofing Can Save You Some Heartache

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When the stars align for handset and network technology, it must be a thing of beauty. Match an LTE-enabled handset with an LTE network and magic happens. But I wouldn't know about that because I foolishly bought a 4G phone on a two-year contract five months before LTE was turned on in my market. And it's killing me inside.

When LTE first switched on in my market, and I realized I was still stuck on HSPA+ with my iPhone 4S for another year and a half—fingers crossed an iPhone 6 drops in October so I can score an early upgrade—I wanted to blame someone. My first thought was, why didn't the retail store tell me to wait for the iPhone 5? They must have known LTE was imminent.

When I called the AT&T store from which I bought my iPhone 4S, a representative told me that the carrier informed them only two days before the unofficial launch. He added that there were rumors circulating among the staff that LTE was going to be switched on during the first quarter of 2013 but they elected to not tell customers because of how late Madison was in getting 3G. It was a perfectly honest and reasonable explanation.

Then I thought to blame the carrier. But when I reached out with my cause for frustration, a spokesperson kindly explained that AT&T typically keeps LTE deployment information close to the vest for competitive reasons. And then she threw out a term that looks much better in the rearview mirror: future-proofing.

Well, that pretty much settled it. It was my own dumb fault that I was stuck with a 4G phone in a new LTE world. Somehow I had failed to heed the LTE chatter that had been going on for the past two years. But I'm sure the same thing had happened to the early settlers who inadvertently trapped themselves on 3G networks. And before that, it afflicted the cavemen, left to club the ground in anger over stranding themselves on 2G.

Certainly there are options for me to escape this HSPA+ rut, but all of those include either lots of money or effort. I'll save early adopters of the LTE prepaid options that have begun to pop up the trouble and say that going that route would have spared me a lot of heartache. Most of all, I will just suck it up and settle for 3-5 mbps.

But I've definitely come away with a valuable takeaway from all of this. If I want to be at the forefront of mobile technology, I'll have to figure out how to get there on my own.

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