

# ATT UVerse Made me Pay to Open Port 25

Posted At : March 22, 2012 11:06 AM | Posted By : Jeffrey Houser

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Words cannot express how seething I am and how I've been treated during my DSL upgrade to ATT UVerse. This is my attempt at getting some closure.

## The Setup

Before I get into details, let me start with some background. I signed up for DSL service when I moved into my house, roughly 10 years ago. I'm not sure why I chose DSL Internet over Cable Internet, but that is the choice I made. I signed up with [SNET](#) a company eventually swallowed up by ATT.

I run a home based business, and as part of that business I have my own email accounts on my own [domains](#). I also pay for static IP Addresses and run a home based server. This server contains things I use for development, such as a SVN repository, a database server, a web server, and a [backup software](#).

I used a Netopia Router to route the static IPs. It was pretty cool, at the router level I was able to use any of my static IP Addresses to a machine based on the Mac address. I gave one to my Vonage router; one to my development server, and one to the rest of the machines in my house.

During the course of any day, my development server may need to send out email, such as notifications related to the backup software, or errors that occur on server. To make that happen I have the IIS SMTP Server installed. It acts as a relay, only accepting emails from the box it is installed on. This should prevent my server from becoming a big spam bot that some open relays.

This setup has worked fine for years, with minor changes. At one point, many years ago, everything stopped and I could not send email. I got on the phone with support and eventually I found out that--without notice--they started blocking port 25. Port 25 is used by many email servers to send email. As best I understand, it's blockage has become much more common in an effort to stop spam emails from being sent. I don't have an inherent problem with that, but my situation is unique and I need that port open. I don't remember details, but I think this was shortly after SNET merged into ATT. It was some time on the phone and everything got fixed without issues.

This is a fairly complicated setup for a 'standard' home network--although probably dead simple for a corporation. I fear any changes to the network because they could interfere with my ability to do business. I've looked at the higher bandwidth of Cable Internet service and never made the switch, everything I had was good enough for my purposes.

This time, I was seriously considering a switch to cable, and was prepared to make the phone call to prepare for the upheaval of my business. I even spent an hour talking to a sales rep from the cable company to ask tons of questions about port blocking, bandwidth limits, and how to use static IPs on their system. Then a letter came from ATT, saying that everyone had to upgrade. I assume this was because I was an SNET customer and they were working to move everyone to the same service.

On paper, this sounded good. It would double my bandwidth and I didn't have to switch providers. I spoke to a sales rep about static IPs, port blocking, bandwidth limits, and related stuff. I was assured

that the "modem" they provide could handle the static IP Routing. I was also assured that the setup should be really easy.

Everything sounded good; I decided to stick with ATT for the upgrade. ATT didn't know it; but they kept a customer that day.

## Upgrade Day

The upgrade was done on Monday, and it has caused a generally horrible week.

The guy came to upgrade. He had never dealt with static IPs before; and had to get his manager to help to get them setup. I think the installation was delayed at least an hour because he plugged a cable into the wrong phone port. My house is rigged for two independent phone ports in every room--a relic from the days before Cell Phones and VOIP.

But, my question was "how do I make use of the Static IPs with this router?" He kept telling me "You shouldn't need to change anything; it should just work." I kept saying, but all the information about the Static IPs and routing is in the Netopia Router that is unplugged and sitting on my desk." The only other time this guy had to set up static IPs was for a hospital. My setup was apparently more complicated than theirs.

We eventually figured out how to use a static IP from the windows machine; just setting the network settings manually. That would suffice for now. I'd prefer a hardware solution like I had last time; but I fear that will [not happen](#).

I spent most of Tuesday trying to get my network setup with a hardware solution, using the new Motorola UVerse router in front of my old Netopia Router. On my server, if I used a static IP; then the machine could not access file sharing on my local network. If I used a dynamic IP; then the server was not remotely accessible. Eventually I discovered that I could get files on and off the machine by using the static IP. That isn't as elegant as what I had, but I'll deal with it for now.

In my previous static IP block; my "dynamic" machines would use one from my static block. That made it easy to tell my [managed hosting provider](#) to just open access to the servers for these IP Addresses. (They only open things like FTP and SQL Server for specific IP Addresses)

Unfortunately, with the new system, the public IP of my U-Verse router is not one from my static IP block. That means my primary dev machine will need to use a static IP address in order to not lose access to the static IP. This wouldn't be a problem if I could have just add a router for all my work machines and assigned it a static IP based on the MAC Address of that router. That router could provide all the machine behind it a dynamic internal IP. It would be my preferred setup.

I spent quite a bit of time trying to finagle the ATT provided router and the old Netopia router to work together. [Here are instructions](#) that should work--as a work around. Alas, I was not able to get them to work. The IP Mapping feature of the Netopia was ignored.

I crawled into bed at 5am on Wednesday morning, completely defeated. I haven't come that close to an all-nighter since studying for a calculus final freshman year in college with [Scott](#), [Jude](#), and some other girl I do not remember. If memory serves me, Kurt Cobain was found dead while we were studying and I found out the next morning. But, I digress.

## Why can't my server Send Emails?

On Wednesday, I tried to resume development (AKA Client Work). It became immediately apparent that my server was not sending emails it should. They would end up in the queue directory of the IIS SMTP Server and the event viewer would show me messages like this:

Message delivery to the host " failed while delivering to the remote domain " for the following reason: The remote server did not respond to a connection attempt.

It was SMTPSVC Error code 4006 for the search engines.

I assumed it was a port blocking problem based on past experience; but wanted to isolate every possibility. So I spent much of Wednesday trying out all options, including trying to open up specific ports using the UVerse router, which is a Motorola NVG510 for those keeping track.

Eventually, I decided I'm getting nowhere and decide it is time to call ATT Support. Believe it or not; this is where my story starts.

## The First Set of Calls

I start on the [ATT web site](#) and click an IM support link; basically asking if a port is blocked and I can't send email. They seem to want to redirect me to someone who can configure my email client. :ugh: I'm given a phone number and give them a call. [I can't find where I wrote down that number, sorry]

I speak to a bit with someone whose name I didn't catch. She redirects me to a second person, "Mickey". Mickey sounded like a girl, but the name is usually Male in the US, so I'm not sure. I go back and forth with Mickey. She asks about my email client I'm using. I say "Thunderbird." But, of course the problem is not with my email client. The problem is with an SMTP Server.

Sending email used to be a problem in the past, but I recently switched to Google Apps which does not use port 25 for their outgoing SMTP server.

I think we eventually got the the port 25 issue. Sometimes she was hard to understand. She gave me the impression that there was on department she couldn't reach and they may be able to fix it for me; but since she can't reach them I had to pay a one time fee of \$15.

I was pretty upset about this; as I've been a customer for 10 years and they forced me to upgrade. I argue with her; and ask to speak to her manager. Somehow she talked me out of that. I'm, roughly, two days into this now so I decide \$15 is a no-brainer so I can get back to servicing real clients. I say, "okay, let's go for it."

Then she starts reading me the terms and conditions. The first word that sticks out is "monthly." And I call her out on it, because she had said it would be a one time fee to open the port. She explains that she is reading an old version of the terms of service and not everything will apply to my situation. I grudgingly let her continue.

Then she comes up to a termination of service fee. I question that too, as it is a one time fee; not a service. She explains, once again, that these are old terms of service and do not apply to my situation.

She also explains that all calls are recorded and she would get fired if she lied to me and she doesn't want that.

Even though, Mikey guaranteed me this problem could be fixed tonight; part of the terms and

conditions were that I was eligible for the time they spent even if they couldn't fix it.

I let her continue. She shifts me to another line to pay, then I'm transferred back to her. She says thank you and offers to transfer me to "Connect Tech". She gives me the number, 1-877-888-7360 and transfers me to Kevin.

With Mickey I was probably too vague on what my issue was. Instead of pushing off her queries about "what mail client do you use." I should have been more explicit. With Kevin; I decided to be more specific. "What Mail Client do you use?" "I use Thunderbird, the issue is not with that, it is with a server that sends outgoing emails. I'm getting the message that it cannot connect." We go on and off; and he eventually tells me he can't help me. I need to talk to ConnectTech-360. I paid for this?

Kevin transfers me to the new ConnectTech-360; which feels like starting from the beginning. It's an automated system that appears to want to tell me how to reconfigure my email. Since I've been through this before, I call out agent, and the system disconnects me.

This was around the time I punched the wall.

## My Second Round of Calls

I spent about fifteen minutes walking around the house trying to think up creative curse words; then decide to try again. I think I started with the main number [which I can't find out where I wrote it down]. I go through the automated system again and eventually get to Jason. At this point, I'm being very specific. "Is port 25 Blocked? My outgoing emails are not being sent." Jason insists that this is not a problem, and goes through "something" and eventually says "Yes, it looks like it is blocked I missed it the first time." He can't help me, but can forward me to someone who can (Consequently called Connect-Tech).

This time when I'm transferred; they ask me to put in a zip code. That's a first, it feels like I'm getting somewhere even if I don't know where.

Kevin transfers me to AJ. The number they gave me at this stage was 1-888-905-2838; which is the same as the first Connect-Tech number they gave. I'm not going in circles too much. I give AJ some information and I think he eventually shuffled me to Sean. I spent most of my time on the phone with Sean [and being on hold]

The first thing that Sean did was congratulate me on purchasing a Connect Tech subscription.

I immediately snap back that I didn't purchase a subscription and that I was told it was a one time fee. Somewhere in my mind; I took a breather while practically screaming at him.

I explained my situation and asked if Port 25 was blocked. He swore up and down that ATT does not block any ports and everything is open and that is part of what people use it for. I said "Then is Port 25 being intercepted in any way?" And he said no; and rattled off a bunch of related ports (110, 80, etc.. ) which should work just fine.

I was pushing him hard somehow. Eventually, like magic he said "oh, we do, let me remove that from your account." I am surprised at his about face on the blocking, which felt like he changed his mind in mid sentence.

He told me it'll take 15 minutes or so to take affect and I should unplug the router and plug it back in.

That is the point where idiot me unplugged the router. When you a VOIP phone--which my new

ATT UVerse phone is--an unplugged router means no phone. I hung up on them, inadvertently.

The router restarted, and he called back 5 minutes later or so. I do give them kudos for that. I ask if he can remove any and all other port blocks and he says my system should be completely open now.

After the router restart, I also restarted SMTP services on my server and magically the queue of emails immediately got sent. Things appear to be good; or at least functional.

## It is time to fight the Charges

I still have serious issues about having to pay more money just to get the same quality of service I had before they forced me to upgrade. I regret not going to Cox for cable modem service. If I was going to go through hell, at least it could have been a brand new hell.

I got this email regarding my purchase, I added emphasis:

Thank you for your AT&T ConneCTech® Services purchase.

The following order has been processed for your requested service.

The service(s) ordered was/were:

AT&T Support Plus Online with ETF (CSR Only)

If you have questions on your remote service, please contact us at 1-866-294-3464 from 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM Central, seven (7) days a week.

Your AT&T Support Plus Online with ETF (CSR Only) **subscription is a 12 month term agreement. An Early Termination Fee of \$120.00** (reduced by \$10.00 after each completed month of the term) applies if you terminate service prior to the end of the 12 month commitment.

You will receive another e-mail in the next few days with tips and additional information that will help you get the most out of your new Support Plus service.

Can't wait? No problem! To get started now, go here and enter your zip code.

The overall price of your order is \$15.15 (includes one-time charges, **initial subscription period**, discounts and taxes).

For monthly recurring subscriptions ordered, you should expect to pay \$15.00 monthly after your initial bill (plus applicable taxes).

All AT&T ConneCTech Services are subject to certain terms and conditions for service. The terms and conditions for your service order are available at [www.connectech.att.com](http://www.connectech.att.com). You agree to be bound by these terms and conditions by continuing to receive your ordered services.

So, I was clearly told by Mikey that this was a one time charge; but the email (and the comment by the Sean) make me think they signed me up for a recurring subscription. Honestly, I don't know if I want to spend another day on the phone to fight it at this point; but I think the principle of the thing is important.

## A final point about static IPs and Hardware

A friend of mine suggested that I try a [LinkSys RV042 Router](#); and I found the manual. On paper it sounds like their One-to-one NAT function is exactly what I need for the IP Mapping on the hardware level. I still have concerns it will actually work, due to other stuff I've read about what the Motorola modem device does.

Writing this was very cathartic for me; and I am less likely to scream at someone during my next phone call.