

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Facing Backlash, Viya Removes \$80 Charge On St. Croix Customers For MiFi Device

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ST. CROIX -- In an effort to quell growing resentment, Viya, the territory's oldest telecommunications company, on Thursday said it would no longer charge St. Croix customers for the MiFi internet hotspot devices that it's making available while customers' at-home internet service is being restored.

Viya CEO Alvaro Pilar told The Consortium on Tuesday [during a press event](#) at its customer experience center on St. Croix, that the company had received 9,000 of the hotspot devices -- all of which were to be distributed to customers for use, albeit through a lottery-like system.

But the offer turned sour after multiple customers complained that Viya was charging St. Croix customers an \$80 fee for each MiFi device, after it had given the same MiFi hotspots to residents in St. Thomas free of charge.

Popular community activists like Renaldo Stevens and Eurman Fahie (known as Coach Fahie), took their grievances to social media and radio talkshows, and on Thursday, they protested at the Viya store on St. Croix.

Of the \$80 fee, Mr. Fahie, well known for his protests, said, "I thought that was unconscionable; that's gangstering [sic] the people of St. Croix. That's not fortitude; they can't see beyond their nose -- how could they divide the Virgin Islands?"

Viya officials have argued that at the time the devices were being distributed in St. Thomas, the hurricanes had only recently struck, and the situation of residents in St. Thomas was much worse compared to the current status of the entire territory today.

But Viya's St. Croix customers, already frustrated with the slow pace in which their service is being restored, and the lottery system that the company said it would utilize to distribute the hotspot devices, saw the charge as adding insult to injury.

While Viya is offering customers refunds, don't expect to walk into a store and receive your money. The company says customers who already paid the \$80 for a MiFi device will have to wait 30-90 days before the refund is issued. Customers also have the option of crediting the funds to their account.

Even though Viya's rollout of its new 4G LTE network has not been the smoothest, tests being carried out by The Consortium has returned results showing superior coverage and faster data speeds over Viya competitors AT&T and Sprint. (A full review is forthcoming.)

The MiFi hotspot comes with two plans: The first costs \$50 and offers 6 megabits per second (Mbps) and up, according to Viya. The company did not clarify whether the 6Mbps speed is realized for both upload and download. The second plan costs \$60 and offers 12Mbps and up, again with no clarity on whether these speeds are equal for uploading and downloading content.

The \$50 plan comes with a limit of 3 gigabits of data use per day, after which the speed slows considerably to 256 kilobits per second (Kbps). The maximum monthly available gigabits per month for the \$50 plan is 20.

For the \$60 plan, the speed slows to 256 Kbps after 5 gigabits of use per day. The monthly available gigabits per month for this plan is 30, according to Viya.

Compared to the AT&T mobile hotspot devices, Viya's offering is extremely attractive. For example, AT&T offers 8 gigabits per month for \$75. You can use as much data as you please, and consume your entire data in a day. If you run out of data in the AT&T plan, you can purchase more — \$10 for 2 gigabits — until the next renewal date of your plan.

Feature Image: A Viya lineman works on a utility pole at the Sunny Isle intersection. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

