

# Urge Congress to Preserve Internet Freedom and Make Net Neutrality Law

Use this fact sheet to craft your statement about Internet freedom and net neutrality.

## What is Network Neutrality?

Network Neutrality — or "Net Neutrality" for short — is the guiding principle that preserves the free and open Internet.

Net Neutrality ensures that all users can access the content or run the applications and devices of their choice on the Internet. With Net Neutrality, the network's only job is to move data — not choose which data to privilege. Net Neutrality prevents the companies that control the wires from discriminating against content based on its source or type.

Net Neutrality is the reason why the Internet has driven economic innovation, democratic participation, and free speech online. It's why the Internet has become an unrivaled environment for open communications, civic involvement and free speech.

Large cable and telephone companies are planning to do away with Net Neutrality. They're asking Congress to pass legislation that allows them to control which Web sites get priority over everything else and which ones are left behind.

Americans of every political stripe have banded together to stop companies like AT&T, Verizon and Comcast from seizing control of the Internet and limiting online choice to the companies that pay them the most money. More than a million Americans have written their representatives in D.C. demanding all Web sites are treated equally.

## What's the problem here?

***Discrimination:*** The Internet was designed as an open medium. The fundamental idea on the Internet since its inception is that every Web site, every feature, and every service should be treated the same. That's how bloggers can compete with the CNN or *USA Today* for readers. That's how up-and-coming musicians can build audiences before they get their first top-40 single. That's why when you use a search engine, you see a list of sites that are the closest match to your request — not those who paid the most to reach you.

***Double-dipping:*** Traditionally, network owners have built their business by charging consumers for access. Now they want to charge you for access to the network, and then charge you again for the things you do while you're online. They may not charge you directly via pay-per-view Web sites. But they will charge the service providers you use — who will pass those costs on to you in the form of price hikes or charges to view content.

***Stifling innovation:*** Net Neutrality ensures that innovators can start small and dream big about being the next EBay or Google without facing insurmountable hurdles. Unless we preserve Net Neutrality, startups and entrepreneurs will be muscled out of the market by big corporations that pay for a top spot on the Web. On a tiered Internet controlled by the only content and services owned by the phone and cable companies — or by their corporate partners who pony up "protection money" — will enjoy life in the fast lane.

## **Isn't this just a battle between giant corporations?**

No. If Congress turns the Internet over to the telephone and cable giants, everyone who uses the Internet will be affected. Web pages you always use for online banking, access to health care information, planning a trip, or communicating with friends and family could fall victim to pay-for-speed schemes. Sending family photos and videos could slow to a crawl. Connecting to your office could take longer if you don't purchase your carrier's preferred applications.

Independent voices and political groups are especially vulnerable. Costs will skyrocket to post and share video and audio clips, silencing bloggers and amplifying the big media companies. Political organizing could be slowed by the handful of dominant Internet providers who ask advocacy groups or candidates to pay a fee to join the fast lane.

Small business owners benefit from an Internet that allows them to compete directly — not one where they can't afford the price of entry. Without Net Neutrality, startups and entrepreneurs will be muscled out of the marketplace by big corporations that pay for a top spot on the Web.

## **Shouldn't we just let the market decide?**

Writing Net Neutrality into law would preserve the freedoms we currently enjoy on the Internet. For all their talk about "deregulation," the cable and telephone giants don't want real competition. They want special rules written in their favor.

Either we make rules that ensure an even playing field for everyone, or we have rules that hold the Internet captive to the whims of a few big companies. The Internet has thrived because revolutionary ideas like blogs, Wikipedia or Google could start on a shoestring and attract huge audiences. Without Net Neutrality, the pipeline owners will choose the winners and losers on the Web.

The cable and telephone companies already dominate 98 percent of the broadband access market. And when the network owners start abusing their control of the pipes, there will be nowhere for consumers to turn.



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