

Net Neutrality

The Internet is a beautiful thing. It democratizes the transfer of information to a greater degree than ever before. It is the quintessence of the ideals of the modern era in that every person and every organization can operate on roughly the same level of efficiency and effectiveness regardless of their standing with a corporate hierarchy typically allowed to wantonly manipulate proceedings according to the whims of their pocket books. It would be tragic to take the Internet as it is today, an open playing field, and transform it into a "two lane highway," one lane for the established elites and the other for the people in general, the latter being what makes the Internet as we know it so special, which is why Broadband Internet should be classified as a common carrier service.

Selectively slowing down internet speeds does have its upsides, like slowing down the speed of Bit Torrent, sometimes used for illegitimate purposes. This is great, except for the fact that Telecom companies are not legal bodies. They are not supposed to act as vigilantes, they are supposed to act as service providers. And if they are allowed to do this with sites such as Bit Torrent, then what happens when they run out of bandwidth for legitimate sites?

Enter Netflix/Comcast battle where obstructing Internet speed of content providers in order to extort favors (aka, Net Neutrality advocates' fears) has already happened. During Netflix's negotiations with Comcast from October 2013 to January 2014, Netflix's download speed dropped by thirty percent (figures taken relative to speed in January 2013 as benchmark 0%*), astounding when one considers that once Netflix agreed to Comcast demands in February of 2014, their speed shot up by 50%*(The Washington Post) and when you take into account that Netflix is a LEGITIMATE COMPETITOR TO COMCAST'S BUSINESS. That is clearly extortion, and yet the FCC is currently considering letting behaviors and practices like these run amok. What's next? YouTube? Twitter? And then Comcast streaming cable is suddenly faster than YouTube, which won't just kill YouTube, it will kill the next thing and its economic potential.

Telecom companies are trying to make the Internet a non-level playing field. For all of their rhetoric about greater economic efficiency, they are advocating for less competition, which is the essence of what makes capitalism awesome. What drives great economies is competition, a force that the loss of net neutrality would all but destroy.

Suddenly, Americans will not have an unlimited amount of (mostly useless) information, they will have a finite amount of (mostly useless) information, not just reducing options, but reducing potential. Making the pig trough smaller does not make it easier to find diamonds, it just makes for less diamonds.

For the record, some telecom companies may publically claim that they support net neutrality, but they are the ones who stand to profit from the loss of net neutrality. Comcast spent well over 18 million in lobbying last year, making them second only to Northrup Grumman in lobbying efforts. Verizon wants a two-lane Internet system so badly that they tried to sue the U.S. government over the issue of providing it or not. They want laws conducive to increasing their profit margins.

Regulation of the Internet does not carry the same weight with the public as, say, the regulation of building codes, copyright laws or the agricultural industry because the Internet is more thoroughly enmeshed with people's minute-by-minute thoughts and activities. It is less an industry than a cultural force, an engine and medium facilitating increased efficiency, innovation and change. The computer aided the economic boom of the late nineties, and gives people a platform for rapid cultural shifts. In the scope of history, everybody, even people on the cover of textbooks and on regulatory bodies are subject to historical forces, and the Internet is one of them, which is why it is so important to keep it democratic.

If you, the FCC, decide to change something people are so widely and deeply involved in, you will be pissing off the wrong people. Comcast will be happy. 87% of American adults (Pew Research Poll) will not. That is a lot of angry people/voters/white collar workers stuck in the "slow lane" who need to get something done with a service they have come to intimately rely on. And since young people tend to be more fond of the Internet, you will really be pissing off future voters. Good luck with politics then, because nothing says clout like 87 percent of current adults and an even higher and more irritated percent of future adults.

The Internet is not Telecom companies' business model. It is not a place for them to charge both content providers such as Google, Amazon and Facebook and content users for access to each other via a plump and greedy middle man extracting value at every turn. There is a reason that even these corporations are on the side of net neutrality. Weirdly, they are in pretty much the same place as their content users, so not only would you be pissing off the people mentioned above, you would be pissing off huge corporations (lobbyists and money in all). Again, good luck with future politics.

The Internet is not broken and there is no need to 'fix it.' Net neutrality has so far worked to be a force for good. For all the complaints of Big Government, Big Corporations shouldn't be allowed to control how people use the Internet. The Internet is where people go to absorb information, where they go to have their thoughts shaped and molded and the thought of a corporation who nobody elected having an impact on how people think, even an indirect one, not just through a few advertisements, but in actual manipulation of others' information, is a disturbing yet not unlikely future without Net Neutrality.