

Montana NEEDS Net Neutrality!

To lose Net Neutrality would be inhibit small growing businesses that rely on the internet to help sell their goods. Here is an article from the Montana Associated Technological Roundtable website (<http://www.matr.net/article-20246.html>):

Computers and Beef Jerky in Rural Montana: Cyberspace Never Tasted This Good
August 14, 2006

People may not think Montana-made beef jerky and computers have much in common, but they do.

At Hi-Country Snack Foods, Inc. <http://www.hicountry.com/> beef jerky is a chief export. Unfortunately, for lovers of dried meat around the state and country the store isn't exactly easy to get to – a common problem for businesses in rural areas of Montana.

That's where computers step in.

With DSL high-speed Internet thanks to the Lincoln Telephone Company, Hi-Country is connecting its customers with quality products faster than their bags of quality jerky fly off the shelves – which is pretty darn fast.

Jeremy Johnson, Director of Retail Mail Order Operations at Hi-Country is straightforward when explaining the impact high-speed Internet has made.

"It's what keeps us in touch with the outside world," he said. "If you remove that, you remove us."

But Johnson's comment isn't without warrant. A survey done by TheRetailBulletin.com in 2006 found that 61 percent of small business owners admitted that without proper Internet service, their business would fail.

However, Johnson said Hi-Country has been using the Internet for some time – just not at high quality speeds, which are essential in processing orders and creating more online sales. In years past, Johnson said dial-up service was used primarily for Internet-based sales and information, which really wasn't much help.

It appears keeping up with technology is also important. Luckily, the local teleco provides the service.

"It would take me a full week to process a big order," he said. "Without DSL there would be no way to properly process orders and continue our e-commerce."

Johnson said his role, which is basically supervising all orders for the business, as well as taking care of Web site maintenance, has changed drastically since DSL came to town.

“About four years ago when we still used dial-up, 40 percent of our orders were by phone,” he said. “That’s totally flip-flopped now with DSL. If we still had dial-up, we wouldn’t be able to support the change we’ve seen.”

“It’s opened up networks for us that we would have never been able to look at before,” he added. “It’s what keeps us alive in this day and age.”

According to Ken Lumpkin, General Manager at the Lincoln Telephone Company, continuing to create better service for small businesses in the Lincoln area is a constant goal. Again, keeping up with technology will be key.

“We currently provide basic DSL for Hi-Country and other businesses like it around Lincoln,” Lumpkin said. “But we’re upgrading our facilities so that we’ll be able to offer them and others Internet at better speeds very soon.”

In addition, Net Neutrality is essential to free speech, equal opportunity and economic innovation in America. Since the FCC removed this basic protection in 2005, the top executives of phone and cable companies have stated their intention to become the Internet’s gatekeepers and to discriminate against Web sites that don’t pay their added tolls.

This fundamental change would end the open Internet as we know it. It would damage my ability to connect with others, share information and participate in our 21st century democracy and economy. The FCC must ensure that broadband providers do not block, interfere with or discriminate against any lawful Internet traffic based on its ownership, source or destination.