

Legislation preserving Net Neutrality benefits consumers strongly by assuring that consumers are given equal access to all Internet content and sites. This will harm consumers in at least 3 distinct ways:

- 1) The access that consumers currently experience to many Internet properties' content and services will degrade because broadband service providers will have financial incentive to do so.
- 2) Consumers' choices of which sites and services are available to them will be reduced
- 3) Services which require a minimum Quality of Service (QoS), such as any service which sends data as it is being used (such as video, audio and IP telephony services) may become unusable through broadband service providers' business agreements

Before going into detail, I would like to state that many of the points that I present would be non-issues if there were many service providers for consumers to choose from. While the current system isn't quite a monopoly, many areas are only serviced by 1 or 2 viable options for broadband service, and this limited choice will not permit consumer market forces to curb the destructive effects of "Packet Deregulation" a.k.a. removing Net Neutrality practices.

"1) The access that consumers currently experience to many Internet properties' content and services will degrade"

If broadband service providers are allowed to enter into contracts which provide preferential access to specific Internet properties (web sites, video services, etc.), the Internet will degrade into a two-tiered system of access.

The first tier of Internet properties are the properties who have paid the broadband service providers' "protection money" -- not dissimilar from extortion, and reminiscent of "protection money" that neighborhood gangs charge local shop owners so that no "accidents" happen in their store. Properties that pay this toll would be guaranteed that consumers would have free access to their services.

The second tier of Internet properties are the properties who have NOT paid the "protection money" for the higher tier of access. When these Internet properties' data packets don't make it to the consumer in a timely fashion, their only recourse will be to pay for the premium service. The internal workings of a broadband provider's network is private, and this second tier of Internet properties will have no insight into what the true problem is. Their only guarantee is that paying for premium service will likely resolve the problem.

The existence of this two-tiered Internet provides the financial incentive for broadband service providers to actually make service WORSE for consumers who attempt to access Internet properties which have not paid this premium service tax, thus making the consumer experience far worse than the equal access that all consumers have enjoyed for the first 13+ years of consumer Internet services.

"2) Consumers' choices of which sites are available to them will be reduced"

Through business agreements, broadband services providers may provide exclusive or preferential treatment to one service provider over another. For example, if Microsoft Live Search were to go into an exclusive agreement with Comcast for search service, Comcast could easily redirect all Internet searches that consumers would try to make on the Comcast Broadband Network to Microsoft's service.

Through a deal of this nature, consumer access to Yahoo Search and Google Search would be eliminated due to Comcast's network policies. Comcast would profit off of its agreement with Microsoft Live Search, and Microsoft Live Search would profit over being able to generate revenue off of the additional searches. Consumers would no have no choice for who they may use for search services. Search Service is just one example of a service that would be affected by this type of private business arrangement. Other services such as E-mail and News access could easily be affected.

"3) Services which require a minimum Quality of Service (QoS), such as any service which sends data as it is being used (such as video, audio and IP telephony services) may become unusable through broadband service providers' business agreements"

A pressing example is that of Voice Over IP Telephone Service providers. Comcast is currently offering its own "Digital Voice VoIP Service". Without Net Neutrality regulations in place, Comcast has the financial incentive to degrade VoIP Services from all other VoIP providers, so that they may make their service the only viable option for consumers.

I have read anecdotal accounts by VoIP customers of various services dealing with this exact problem in Canada. Certain Canadian Broadband Service Providers are "traffic shaping" (degrading service) for all VoIP services other than the broadband service provider's own VoIP service!

Closing

The Internet has become the wild success that it is by the (until recently) strongly honored code of Net Neutrality. Now that "Big Telecom" has devised ways of extracting profit out of charging tolls for preferential network access, these honored principles are eroding. Please pass legislation to make broadband service providers to treat all packets equally, regardless of the nature of the service or its point of origin so that consumer choice is protected.