

Why net neutrality is more important than toast

First, I must say that whole wheat toast is one of the staples of my diet. If you consider one slice of toast a serving, I'd say I eat 4-6 servings of toast every day.

Right now, I live in a room that's 8-by-8 feet wide just a few hundred yards from Palm Beach. Most nights you can find me laying on a military-issue cot with my laptop on my chest and an Aircard flashing its little green light that tells me I'm connected to the Web. I've got a voice when I log on -- and it has the potential to be just as loud as the voice of the New York Times, CNN, even Capitol Hill.

There's something magical about that voice. It's like bending spoons. It's the promise of endless possibility, of piping up when I'd otherwise be silent. And it's the promise of hearing voices from tens of thousands of miles away or, even from a few blocks up the street.

The power of an egalitarian Web was most evident to me during Hurricane Katrina. I found myself accessing blogs from regular people -- the victims who had left their homes when the waters got too high -- just as often as I was checking the Picayune site. When I visited those homegrown blogs, I felt like I was peering in on something genuine, something raw and entirely real. That's the sort of thing we're looking for as human beings, and, in that case, we didn't have to wait to get info from the small, tucked-away publishers on the Web.

Katrina made faraway events rattle about in my head. Unedited, free, sometimes panicked, the voices touched me in ways that no newscaster can.

That's a big part of the reason I stopped watching television years ago. It grew too slick, too polished, too eager to offer me a product. I was starved for real human voices. I just couldn't hear them because of the barriers that stand in the way of starting one's own TV show, or getting an invite to appear on an existing one. The people who can get past the roadblocks end up far ahead of the people who are stuck on the other side.

On the Internet, neutrality keeps the flow of power and information from being concentrated in the hands of a few, and I'm sure that's something our founding fathers would have been tickled pink about. I imagine sitting down for toast (and maybe tea) with the founding fathers. We'd be winking at each other and acting giddy and chortling and such because for a little while it would look like everyone was going to be equal. "Just give them a keyboard and they'll all be created the same," we'd say.

And yes, if the founding fathers looked at me sternly and said, "Fred, we need you to give up toast in order to make this happen," I have to admit I'd grimace a bit. I love toast, and I love how economical it

is (especially with my recently-acquired Costco membership). But, I know that in the end, I'd take one for the team. No more honey and faux butter called Smart Balance. I'd convert to a toast-free life.

I'd do it because I see nothing but benefits for taking that route (beyond, of course, losing my beloved golden-brown bread). The other path doesn't seem to lead anywhere that's happy and egalitarian. And I'm for things that are happy and egalitarian. I'm so for them that I'm willing to sacrifice a little bit so that everyone has a fair shot at publishing on the Web. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my opinion.