

## A free online market requires Net Neutrality

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.

"How so?" you may ask. Consumers are already paying for a certain speed of internet access. On the other side, website owners are also paying for a certain speed of internet access. Now telecoms want to add a third payment into the mix, by charging website owners (again) for preferential access to their subscribers. Not only will website and service owners need to be concerned with how much overall bandwidth they need (influencing how many users of all consumer ISPs can access the site and how quickly), but also how much they want to put into preferred service with individual consumer ISPs (influencing how many users of a particular ISP can visit the website and how quickly on an ISP by ISP basis).

What does this mean? It means that small online businesses and independent news sites and blogs who can't afford preferential service get the slowest access on individual consumer ISPs. This can have the effect of making access so cumbersome that the ISPs are effectively blocking those websites to their users. This also means that ISPs can deny preferential access to online services that compete with their own offerings and those of its partners.

For example, if an ISP was partnered with Google, it could effectively block yahoo.com to its users. Now that's an extreme example that wouldn't hold up, too many users would complain. But what if Microsoft was to create a competitor to YouTube, and the ISP had an agreement with Google and YouTube? The ISP could deny preferential access to Microsoft's offering or give Youtube vastly superior access. Sure maybe the site is not blocked, but what do the ISP's users think of Microsoft's new site? "That site is too slow, I'm going to stick with YouTube." And then what reason does YouTube have to innovate? Or Microsoft for that matter. Instead of competing for users, they are competing for preferential treatment on ISPs, the users locked into whatever their ISP gives them better access to. And what about the smaller startup company that doesn't yet have the money to compete on that level? They don't even stand a chance. And of course it would be easy to see what would happen if an ISP decided to create their own online video service - the big boys and the small fries throttled down to excruciatingly slow speeds while the ISP's own offering is lightning fast by

comparison. And this doesn't even consider the handful of companies that own the backbone of the internet here in the US, segments of the web that everyone uses, those companies could decide what online ventures succeed and fail on a national scale.

This may seem somewhat alarmist at this point, but the ISPs are already working on this. Thinking about how they can make the most money on their existing infrastructure before they are forced to upgrade it to bring us closer to the other major industrialized nations in the world.