

## Small Business Owner and Media Entrepreneur Succeed

I rarely have a problem with paying for a privilege. In fact, I rather like tiered systems because at heart I am a snob and a classist and I am perfectly fine with ponying up a little dough to make my life easier or better. But I believe firmly that there are certain areas in which one cannot and should not be able to pay to make one's life easier. The life of culture and the life of economics are not areas in which one should be concerned with equality (we are not all equally good artists or businesswomen) but the life of the citizen and politics is one in which equality is quite a concern and the situations in which one invokes one's rights to equality as a citizen. It is in this situation that I find myself concerned and confused when it comes to net-neutrality.

Are we concerned about a situation in which we act as citizens, as artists, or as business people when it comes to Net Neutrality?

Now one has to ask or wonder where information, which is the essential nature of the Internet, falls in the three fold social order I have outlined. Information is increasingly becoming a commodity, will be a commodity, and in many senses should be a commodity. I make my living off of curating information, sifting through the debris of fashion and web 2.0 and crafting strategies, businesses, and editorial which then has added value to the consumers. In that sense, it is a commodity and I deserved to be paid for it. Of course, the Internet age says that information should be free but in reality it isn't the information that is at issue but rather the infrastructure that gets you to the information. It is where information and infrastructure collide that we have a problem and it is that which makes net neutrality so tricky.

But infrastructure is a very hard thing to commodify, particularly when there are few enterprises to provide viable alternatives. In the case of roads for instance most would think it laughable to privatize the whole shebang and yet one of the best routes to the airports in Denver is a private road E-470 and I happily pay to get to my flight on time. But would this work if I did not have other viable, in this case, public alternatives? I have my doubts.

The idea of paying for access, i.e the position of the telecommunications companies, makes a good deal of sense to me. One should pay for the services one uses. But the Internet was not founded on a pay as you go or tiered system of information access. From its infancy sure you paid to get online but once there the network's only job is to move data — not choose which data to privilege with faster or better service. This in turn led to a flowering of communication and business. Blogs and new media would not have the power they do today without it. Without net-neutrality we would not have as free a press as we do now. Coutorture Media, my company, would not have been able to exist if we had to pay to speed information flow and consumers to our sites. The anti-competitive behavior would have killed a viable start up like ours before we even got off the ground. As it is I already complain about

our restricted ability to cover events in fashion, imagine if I had to pay to make sure people could even access our report.

In that sense, I support net neutrality heartily. Perhaps in the future we can pay and craft tiered systems in a flourishing of telecommunications start ups and options. But I have my doubts that something as close to its infancy as the Internet would benefit from being restricted in such a manner. Look at what happened to Netscape when Microsoft bundled Internet Explorer. Hell, browsers are still underdeveloped because of that one instance. Imagine then if certain browsers were privileged on the networks, imagine if certain sites were privileged, and imagine if certain viewpoints are privileged unless you are educated and rich enough to look elsewhere.

The rich heritage of entrepreneurship and democracy online which has pumped billions of dollars into our economy, indeed is one of America's last great hopes for innovation and success would be doomed just to line the pockets of stumbling telecommunications giants for a few more years. We cannot allow this to happen. Even as a libertarian I believe in this case it is the government's job to prevent networks from becoming "gatekeepers," at very least until there are sufficient networks to allow everyone a fair shot at being accessed and at being accessible.

As Vint Cerf say "We risk losing the Internet as a catalyst for consumer choice, for economic growth, for technological innovation and for global competitiveness."

Some believe passing net neutrality would stifle innovation but I believe it is the other way around. The beauty of technology is the low barriers to entry, making anyone smart enough and savvy enough to pursue a good idea capable of seeding a real business and pushing our economy forward. Lose that and God knows what will happen.

So I say to my Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez (who happens to sit on the the House Committee on Small Business and the House Subcommittee on Capital Markets, Insurance and Government Sponsored Enterprises so she should have a vested interest in doing something about this beyond saving small businesses in her district like Coutorture) support net neutrality.