

The Internet is an amazing, open platform whose democratizing powers we have barely started to scratch the surface of. It is still in its infancy. Like the printing press, the Internet is a technology that will be with our civilization for all time. The printing press was invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440s. Imagine if a small group of people or corporations had been given power over it before the 1500s even started. How much more impoverished would our society be today? How much less democratic? If you consider any of the values we hold most dear (including economic power and wealth), I think it is clear that our society would be worse off with respect to any and all of them had such a technology's spread been controlled by the short-term interests of a relatively small group. We are currently facing a decision of similar import right now with respect to the Internet.

Net Neutrality fits well with America's libertarian values. Just like it is un-American for big government to have too much control over citizens, it is also un-American for big business to have too much control over citizens. For America to be competitive in the modern world, access to information is as important as access to any other resource. It would be a travesty to allow the short-term interests of telecoms to trump the needs of an entire nation. I am an entrepreneur and capitalist and value wealth creation, but it is not like the telecoms are not hugely profitable already. Squeezing every last cent from the system, at the expense of its openness is not a good trade. The Internet does not need toll booths but American society does need an open, neutral Internet.

Though the first assaults on Net Neutrality may not appear to jeopardize freedom of information and communication, people are not smart enough to understand the consequences of tinkering with these things and there are obvious risks of a slippery slope. Traffic shaping today may lead to anti-competitive and even anti-democratic practices tomorrow. Any ruling against Net Neutrality would be the worst of government, while openness and freedom are the best of America.

Imagine, 10 or 20 years from now, when Net Neutrality laws have solidified in countries around the world, and America has policies that are less free and open than other countries like Japan or the EU, somewhere in between Germany and Russia. That is not right. America should side with Net Neutrality and the FCC can do it. The Internet is not just an information service, but also the core of our communication network. Services like Skype, email, voip, chat programs, bulletin boards, messenger program, video conferencing like NetMeeting, even multi-player video games clearly place the Internet into the category of communications infrastructure, and therefore under the jurisdiction of the FCC. Please do not make a historic mistake.

Sincerely,  
Philipp Hertel

