

I am Jeff Jarvis, professor and director of the Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism at the City University of New York and author of the books "Public Parts" and "What Would Google Do?" and the ebook "Gutenberg the Geek."

I ask you to govern your decisions regarding net neutrality and broadband policy according to the principles of equality that have made the internet the powerful engine of freedom, speech, innovation, and economic development that it has already become.

As Sen. Al Franken said at the South by Southwest conference in 2011, we proponents of net neutrality are not asking you to change the internet; we are asking you to protect the net from change imposed by the companies trying to exploit their positions of control. "We have net neutrality right now," Sen. Franken said. "And we don't want to lose it. That's all. The fight for net neutrality isn't about improving the Internet. It's not about changing the Internet at all. It's about ensuring that it stays just the way it is."

I put it this way in a question to then-President Nicolas Sarkozy at the eG-8 meeting he convened in Paris that same year: "First, do no harm." I urge you to take that Hippocratic Oath for the net. Do not allow it to change. Preserve its equality.

The first principle upon which the net must be maintained is that all bits are created equal. If any bit is stopped on its way by a censor in China or Iran ... if a bit is slowed by an ISP because it did not carry a premium toll ... if a bit is detoured and substituted by that ISP to promote its service over a competitor's ... or indeed if a bit is spied upon by the government of China or Iran or the United States ... then no bit can be presumed to be free. The net is built edge-to-edge so that anyone can speak with anyone without discrimination.

Another principle upon which the net must be maintained is that it is open and distributed and if any institution -- government or corporate oligopoly -- claims sovereignty over it, then it is no longer the net. Of course, I recognize the irony of asking a government agency for help but that is necessary when a few parties hold undue control over choke points in this architecture. The real answer is to ensure open and broad competition, for any provider in a competitive marketplace that offers throttled, incomplete, inferior service will lose; in an oligopoly, such providers use their control for profitability over service. Corporations by their nature exploit control. Government protects consumers from undue exercise of such control. That is your job.

Google Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt has offered another principle: the permissionless nature of the net. "Let's give credit to the people who foresaw the internet, opened it up, designed it so it would not have significant choke points, and made it possible for random people including twenty-four-year-olds in a dorm to enter and create," he said.

My entrepreneurial journalism students can barely afford to start the companies they are creating, the companies that I believe will be the salvation of journalism, scaling up from the bottom, not from the top. Innovation, we already know, will come from the entrepreneurs over the corporate incumbents. These entrepreneurs cannot afford to pay premiums to ISPs for access to their customers.

We know that corporate incumbents in this industry will abuse the control they have to disadvantage competitors. I filed a complaint with the Commission last year when Verizon refused to connect my Google Nexus 7 LTE tablet to its network as required by the Commission's own rules governing that spectrum as "open." The incumbent ISPs have demonstrated well that they choose not to understand the definition of "open."

"Changes in the information age will be as dramatic as those in the Middle Ages," James Dewar wrote in a 1998 Rand Corporation paper. "The printing press has been implicated in the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Scientific Revolution, all of which had profound impacts on their eras; similarly profound changes may already be underway in the information age." The internet is our Gutenberg press. Note well

7521387542.txt

that it took 50 years after the invention of Gutenberg's press for the book to take on the form we know today. It took 100 years, says Gutenberg scholar Elizabeth Eisenstein, for the impact of the book on society to be fully recognized. It took 150 years and the development of postal services before anyone thought of using the press to create a newspaper and 400 years -- with the advent of steam technology and mass production -- before newspapers were in the hands of the common man and woman.

We do not know what the internet is yet and what it will foster. It is too soon to limit it and to grant control over it to a few, powerful companies. I urge you to protect its freedoms by enforcing a principle of net neutrality and to nurture its growth and development with a broadband policy that fosters competition over control and -- here is my best hope -- I urge you to establish the principle of a human right to connect to the network with equality for all.

Thank you.