



Reading Resources: Set 3

Reading 2

Title

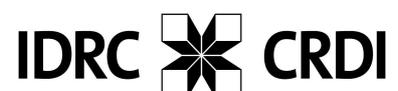
'Excerpts from postings on APC News and FreePress'

Author

Jorge Bossio and others



with



International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Excerpts from posting on APC News and FreePress

Jorge Bossio and others. APC News and FreePress.

Network Neutrality

Someone turns on his or her computer, clicks on a link to a website that someone recommended and gets a message like this from the internet service provider: “This site is not available with the basic service plan. To subscribe to premium service, please call 0-800-555-1234.”

Then, the same person tries to visit the website where his or her family uploads and stores photos and videos and get this message: “This service is no longer included as part of this service plan. Click here for access through the low-speed public network or click here to find out about the other plans we offer.”

Net neutrality

This situation, which seems like a something out of a science fiction novel, clearly shows what could happen if the principle of net neutrality was abandoned. In fact, this would imply the existence of two networks, one open and public and the other closed and exclusive, similar to free-to-air television channels and cable television channels. Certain websites or online applications would only be accessed by paying extra for a specific internet access service, just like the “premium” channels on television. Besides, people would have to pay an internet company extra to have their company websites or blogs visible to regular customers and visitors.

Who could even think of turning the internet into something so much like television? The debate between those who want the internet to remain open and unfiltered (net neutrality supporters) and those who propose the use of network management systems to make more efficient use of the network (network management supporters) is complex and covers a wide range of issues.

For those who support net neutrality the issues at stake run from market concentration and the possibility of a single company gaining majority or even monopoly control over the market, to issues related to freedom of expression and obstacles to innovation, competition and universal broadband access.

Excerpts from http://www.freepress.net/policy/internet/net_neutrality

What's Network Neutrality?

Network Neutrality, or Net Neutrality for short, is the fundamental principle that preserves the free and open Internet.

Net Neutrality means that Internet service providers may not discriminate between different kinds of content and applications online. It guarantees a level playing field for all Web sites and Internet technologies.

Net Neutrality has always been part of the Internet. In fact, it's because of Net Neutrality that the Internet has driven economic innovation, democratic participation and free speech online. Net Neutrality protects the consumer's right to use any equipment, content, application or service without interference from the network provider.

Who Wants to Get Rid of Net Neutrality?

The nation's largest telephone and cable companies, including Comcast, AT&T, Verizon and Time Warner Cable, want to be Internet gatekeepers, deciding which Web sites go fast or slow and which won't load at all.

These companies want to tax content providers to guarantee speedy delivery of their data. And they want to discriminate in favor of their own search engines, Internet phone services and streaming video -- while slowing down or blocking services offered by their competitors.

Instead of a level playing field, they want to reserve express lanes for their own content and services -- or those of big corporations that can afford to pay steep tolls -- and leave the rest of us on a winding dirt road.

These companies are spending hundreds of millions of dollars lobbying Congress and the Federal Communications Commission to get rid of Net Neutrality, putting the future of the Internet at risk.

What's at Stake if We Lose Net Neutrality?

The consequences of a world without Net Neutrality would be devastating. Innovation would be stifled, competition limited, and access to information restricted. Consumer choice and the free market would be sacrificed to the interests of a few corporations.

On the Internet, consumers are in ultimate control -- deciding between content, applications and services available anywhere, no matter who owns the network. There's no middleman. But without Net Neutrality, the Internet will look more like cable TV. Network owners will decide which channels, content and applications are available; consumers will have to choose from their menu.

The Internet has always been driven by innovation. Web sites and services succeed or fail on their own merits. Without Net Neutrality, decisions now made collectively by millions of users will be made in corporate boardrooms. The choice we face now is whether we can choose the content and services we want, or whether Internet gatekeepers will choose for us.

Excerpts from a document by "Free Press", 'Why Consumers Demand Network Neutrality – Fact versus Fiction'

FACT 1: Network Neutrality protections have existed for the entire history of the Internet. Opponents of Internet freedom pretend that Network Neutrality protections would mean new, onerous government regulations. But advocates of Network Neutrality are not promoting new regulations. We are preserving tried and tested consumer protections and network operating principles that have made the Internet the greatest engine of economic growth and democratic communication in modern memory.

FACT 2: Network discrimination through a "tiered Internet" will severely curtail consumer choice. Network owners say discrimination will benefit consumers with higher-quality services. But winners and losers in the content marketplace should be chosen based on the merits of a Web site or service, not the whims of the network owners. Without Network Neutrality, telephone and cable companies will have a strong financial incentive to distort the free market in favor of their own content and services.

FACT 3: Network discrimination will undermine innovation, investment and competition. The genius of the Internet is that it always has allowed "innovation without permission."¹ It has been a free marketplace of ideas where innovators and entrepreneurs rise and fall on their own merits. But on a "tiered Internet" without Network Neutrality, the upstarts and little guys will be at the mercy of

the network owners to decide who can succeed or fail.

FACT 4: Network discrimination will fundamentally alter the consumer's online experience by creating fast and slow lanes for Internet content. Up to this point, the consumer has been the ultimate decision-maker online; the network owners simply transmitted data over the wires, regardless of its content. The network owners claim they won't harm or degrade anybody else's content in a world without Network Neutrality. But network prioritization is a zero-sum game. The fact is that every time one Web site is sped up, another must be slowed down.

FACT 5: No one gets a "free ride" on the Internet. The network operators allege that if Network Neutrality is preserved, they won't be able to build new, high-speed networks. This is a myth. With Network Neutrality, they'll continue to generate revenues in the billions from monthly subscription fees, access rates from content producers (who already pay a fortune to get onto the network), and by competing in the free market with their own content and applications. Getting rid of Network Neutrality is just an attempt to extract monopoly rents from a new revenue stream.

FACT 6: Telephone companies have received billion of dollars in public subsidies and private incentives to support network build-out. The phone companies say they should be able to do as they like with "their pipes." But they ignore the billions of dollars in public subsidies and incentives they've received over the years that allow them to dig up public rights-of-way, build rural networks, and write off the depreciation of their wires. If they gave back even a fraction of the public money they've received, we could build fiber to every home in America.

FACT 7: There is little competition in the broadband market. Network owners argue that Network Neutrality is unnecessary because there is plenty of competition for broadband access to deter bad behavior. But cable and DSL now dominate 98 percent of the broadband market (and a significant portion of the country has only a single broadband provider or none at all). If both the cable and phone companies are using their networks to discriminate, the consumer is trapped. There is nowhere else to go.

FACT 8: Consumers will bear the costs for network infrastructure regardless of whether there is Network Neutrality. The network owners claim consumers will save money without Network Neutrality, because content providers will bear more of the delivery costs. But those costs will simply be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices for consumer goods and Internet services. And with less competition on a "tiered Internet," the network owners will be able to raise their own prices with impunity. Higher prices, fewer choices and less competition are bad for consumers.

FACT 9: Investing in increased bandwidth is the most efficient way to solve network congestion problems. There is more traffic flowing over the Internet every day. To avoid "traffic jams," network operators have two choices. They can increase the bandwidth to accommodate all content providers on an equal basis; or they can maintain scarcity and charge providers for the privilege of getting through the bottlenecks. Without Network Neutrality, phone and cable companies have an economic incentive not to relieve the congestion.

FACT 10: Network owners have explicitly stated their intent to build business models based on discrimination. The Astroturf groups set up by the industry repeatedly claim that Network Neutrality is a solution in search of a problem. But consumer advocates aren't imagining a doomsday scenario. In fact, the top executives of nearly every major telephone company have stated clearly in the pages of Business Week, the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post that they intend to discriminate or degrade the content and services of their competitors who don't pay for a spot in the fast lane.

FACT 11: The House and Senate telecom bills will not deter discrimination and even tie the hands of the FCC from ever preventing it. Neither of the telecom bills in the House (COPE Act, HR 5252)

or the Senate (ATOR Act, S 2686) protects meaningful, enforceable network neutrality. If Congress passes the House bill or the Senate bill as it was reported out of the Commerce Committee, there will be no laws guaranteeing consumers' right to the online content of their choice for the first time in the history of the Internet. Instead, network owners will be able to set up "tiers" that discriminate between different Internet content and services – they will be permitted to decide for consumers what content they select and services they will use.

FACT 12: Supporters of Network Neutrality represent a broad, nonpartisan coalition that joins right and left, commercial and noncommercial interests. The campaign to preserve Network Neutrality protections is perhaps the most diverse set of public and private interests backing any single issue in Washington today. Hundreds of groups and hundreds of thousands of individuals from across the political spectrum are joining together to save this cornerstone principle of consumer choice and Internet freedom.