

EDITORIALS

Silence on Net Neutrality reversal will throttle mobile innovation

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Not much thought is being given to this news – what with all the geopolitical turmoil worldwide – but the whole notion of all content being equal on the Internet is about to become history.



It is a shame that the Federal Communications Commission has had to revise its stance on Net Neutrality after a federal appeals court struck down twice rules to ensure that the Internet is free and open.

Not content

Most media have relegated this news to secondary-item status, but there has not been much outcry over what is about to happen next: companies that control Internet access to homes and mobile devices will be able to charge a la carte prices to content producers such as Netflix, Yahoo, Amazon, Google or Disney for ensuring speedy delivery of video, images and words.

Quite understandably, these content owners are not happy about this development that will have them pay Internet service providers, cable operators and wireless carriers tolls to

carry their content via a fast-track lane. Right there, the FCC will have created a two-track Internet for those who can afford to pay the pipe owners and those who cannot. This defies the very reason why the Internet took off: low barriers of entry for upstarts and startups to launch an idea or challenge incumbents.

The real winners of this move will be, as usual, Big Business. Comcast, Time Warner Cable, Verizon, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile will now call the shots and determine the rate of online and mobile content and video innovation by sheer virtue of their near-monopoly status as gatekeepers to the Internet across all channels.

Marketers in the mobile space must now worry about the law of unintended consequences. Not only will data charges go up for consumers, but so will marketers have to pony up more to deliver video on platforms that consumers are increasingly consuming content on such as smartphones and tablets.

Big deter

While the United States economy is resuming its former swagger, the recovery is pointing to an ugly truth. Big corporations are growing bigger and midsized and smaller firms are getting squeezed. Netflix and Disney have deep pockets to swallow the new gatekeeper's toll, but not the rest of American business whose voices or interests are either not heard or ignored on Capitol Hill.

While this publication is not a fan of government regulation, now is the time for Congress – goaded by marketers – to step in and protect the free and fair nature of the Internet. The FCC claims it will keep consumer interest in mind when approving special lanes on a case-by-case basis. Well, then how is it that Internet access to homes, offices and devices nationwide is controlled by less than 10 major Internet service providers, cable operators and wireless carriers?

Big Business is out to turn the Internet into traditional media – lumbering and controlled with few doors to get in and fewer windows to look out. Charging preferential rates to deliver Internet content to desktop and mobile devices will turn the Internet into cable television. What is to stop the distribution-channel owners to evolve a similar policy toward ecommerce and mobile commerce across all screens? This is the very definition of creep. Speak up or pay for it.

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