

Net Neutrality: What You Need to Know Now

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When you go online you have certain expectations. You expect to be connected to whatever website you want. You expect that your cable or phone company isn't messing with the data and is connecting you to all websites, applications and content you choose. You expect to be in control of your internet experience.

When you use the internet you expect Net Neutrality.

Net Neutrality is the basic principle that prohibits internet service providers like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon from speeding up, slowing down or blocking any content, applications or websites you want to use. Net Neutrality is the way that the internet has always worked.

In 2015, millions of activists pressured the Federal Communications Commission to adopt historic Net Neutrality rules that keep the internet free and open — allowing people to share and access information of their choosing without interference.

But right now the internet is in peril. [On Dec. 14, 2017, the FCC's Republican majority approved Chairman Ajit Pai's plan to gut the Net Neutrality protections.](#)

A former Verizon lawyer and a Trump appointee, Pai ignored the widespread outcry against his plan from millions of people, lawmakers, companies and public-interest groups.

We can't let Pai have the last word on this — which is why we're calling on Congress to use a "resolution of disapproval" to overturn the FCC's vote to dismantle the Net Neutrality rules.

[Urge lawmakers to reverse the FCC vote today.](#)

What is Net Neutrality?

Net Neutrality is the internet's guiding principle: It preserves our right to communicate freely online. Net Neutrality means an internet that enables and protects free speech. It means that ISPs should provide us with open networks — and shouldn't block or discriminate against any applications or content that ride over those networks. Just as your phone company shouldn't decide who you call and what you say on that call, your ISP shouldn't interfere with the content you view or post online.

The internet without Net Neutrality isn't really the internet.

What will happen to the internet now?

Without the Net Neutrality rules, companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon will be able to

call all the shots and decide which websites, content and applications succeed.

These companies can now slow down their competitors' content or block political opinions they disagree with. They can charge extra fees to the few content companies that can afford to pay for preferential treatment — relegating everyone else to a slower tier of service.

The consequences will be particularly devastating for marginalized communities media outlets have misrepresented or failed to serve. People of color, the LGBTQ community, indigenous peoples and religious minorities in the United States rely on the open internet to organize, access economic and educational opportunities, and fight back against systemic discrimination.

Without Net Neutrality, how will activists be able to fight oppression? What will happen to social movements like the Movement for Black Lives? How will the next disruptive technology, business or company emerge if internet service providers let only incumbents succeed?

Tell me about the Title II rules we just lost. Why is Title II so important?

After a decade-long battle over the future of the internet, in 2015 the FCC adopted strong Net Neutrality rules based on Title II of the Communications Act, giving internet users the strongest protections possible.

Courts rejected two earlier FCC attempts to craft Net Neutrality rules and told the agency that if it wanted to adopt such protections it needed to use the proper legal foundation: Title II. In February 2015, the FCC did just that when it reclassified broadband providers as common carriers under Title II.

Title II gave the FCC the authority it needed to ensure that companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon can't block, throttle or otherwise interfere with web traffic. Title II preserved the internet's level playing field, allowing people to share and access information of their choosing. These rules ushered in a historic era of online innovation and investment.

The Title II rules also withstood two challenges from industry. Free Press [helped argue the case](#) defending the FCC — and on June 14, 2016, a federal appeals court [upheld the open-internet protections](#) in all respects.

[We're now preparing to sue the FCC to restore the Title II rules.](#)

Why is Net Neutrality so crucial for communities of color?

The open internet allows people of color to tell their own stories and organize for racial justice. When activists are able to turn out thousands of people in the streets at a moment's notice, it's because ISPs aren't allowed to block their messages or websites.

The mainstream media have long misrepresented, ignored and harmed people of color. And thanks to systemic racism, economic inequality and runaway media consolidation, people of color own just a handful of broadcast stations.

This dynamic will only get worse: In 2017, Chairman Pai demolished most of the remaining media-ownership rules. The lack of diverse ownership is a primary reason why the media

have gotten away with criminalizing and dehumanizing communities of color.

The open internet allows people of color and other vulnerable communities to bypass traditional media gatekeepers. Without Net Neutrality, ISPs could block speech and prevent dissident voices from speaking freely online. Without Net Neutrality, people of color would lose a vital platform.

And without Net Neutrality, millions of small businesses owned by people of color wouldn't be able to compete against larger corporations online, which would deepen economic disparities.

Why is Net Neutrality important for businesses?

Net Neutrality is crucial for small business owners, startups and entrepreneurs, who rely on the open internet to launch their businesses, create markets, advertise their products and services, and reach customers. We need the open internet to foster job growth, competition and innovation.

It's thanks to Net Neutrality that small businesses and entrepreneurs have been able to thrive online. But without Net Neutrality, ISPs will exploit their gatekeeper position and destroy the internet's fair and level playing field.

Without Net Neutrality, the next Google or Facebook will never get off the ground.

What can we do now?

Congress has the power to reverse the FCC's vote. [Urge your lawmakers to use a "resolution of disapproval" to overturn the FCC's decision to dismantle the Net Neutrality rules.](#)

The Trump administration is doing everything in its power to clamp down on dissent. If we lose Net Neutrality, it will have succeeded.

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