

By Hunter Newby



Freedom Isn't Free, and Neither is the Internet

Freedom to live and choose as one wishes is a part of the American Dream. For freedom to exist, there must be laws, and those laws must be enforceable and enforced.

Also, the physical land within which freedom exists must be defended from enemies – foreign and domestic. If the land cannot be defended, it can be attacked and taken over by another ruling body that has a different set of standards and values that most likely will limit, or eliminate freedom. Otherwise, why would the land and/or the law of the land be attacked?

Protection and enforcement of laws to maintain freedom are not free services. They cost time, money, and resources and must be paid for. The police departments, court systems, and military are all compensated for their efforts. U.S. citizens want a superior military protecting our country and way of life, so we are in favor of spending tax dollars on research and development for new weapons, expanding intelligence gathering and surveillance on the enemy, and employing our amazing military personnel – many of whom pay the ultimate price for which no dollar value can really be attributed.

This is how it works in America, right? So, how is the open and free Internet any different? This is the argument for the case that is being built by those that control access to the Internet and those behind them that want access to every bit of information possible.

Think of those access provider entities as landowners. They essentially own paths that lead to an open marketplace within a town square where buyers and sellers meet, but also where individuals congregate and communicate openly with others without the fear that they are being followed, watched, and listened to. The owners of the paths charge a fee for access to the town square for them to generate revenue that goes toward maintaining and repairing the path. The users are getting value and someone needs to operate the path. That seems fair, right? The key is that the path owners never ask the merchant's the volume of what they were selling as a measure of what they would charge.

It is critical to know that the path is a physical place just as the open marketplace is a physical place, but they are not the same as they are each owned by different landlords. So the town square and access to the town square are two totally different things. At one point the town square and the paths to and from it all had the same set of laws governing them that established fairness, trust, and equality for all those that entered, exited, transacted and communicated though, over and within.

Since these laws were established, well-known, and presumably enforceable, there was a significant investment made by the people and merchants that established the town square and marketplace and the location where they would meet and transact. Over time it became so popular that it reached critical mass and became invaluable and a complete necessity.

Now, imagine after all of the investment was made the owners of the paths decided to change the rules.

On May 15 U.S. regulators advanced a net neutrality proposal that would ban Internet providers from blocking or slowing down access to websites but may let them charge content companies for faster and more reliable delivery of their traffic to users, as reported by Reuters.

Simply stated, the Internet access providers will be allowed to perform deep packet inspection to determine which traffic is coming from companies that pay a premium rate, and the rest will get routed to the basic Internet access, which will be provided on a path that has one lane and is not well maintained. There is no need to block, or intentionally slow down, any access to the Internet as every company that does not pay a premium will be stuck in traffic. The routing on to the low-class Internet access path is effectively discrimination, and the congestion caused by all of the other basic, low-budget, garbage traffic is effectively blocking, so a ban functionally would serve no purpose as it would be a part of the legal construct of the new Internet access (net-neutrality) rules. ■■

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