

Tell Congress to Restore Net Neutrality to Protect Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs

In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted consumer protections that ensured internet service providers (ISPs) like AT&T, Comcast, and CenturyLink couldn't discriminate against the content that consumers access. **Net neutrality prohibits ISPs from blocking and slowing down traffic or setting up pay-to-play schemes that would let ISPs make a profit by harming small businesses and giving priority access to the biggest firms with the deepest pockets.** Since the creation of the commercial internet, the FCC always maintained it could prevent anti-competitive and anti-consumer practices that harmed small business participation in the digital economy.

In December 2017, the FCC voted to eliminate its net neutrality protections and said ISPs could decide for themselves whether to set up pay-to-play arrangements or block or degrade internet traffic. **Unless the FCC's decision is reversed, ISPs will be allowed to sell priority access to their subscribers to the highest bidder, leaving small businesses and new firms stuck on digital dirt roads.**

What is Net Neutrality?

- Net neutrality is the principle that consumers who use the internet should be able to access the content and applications they want, without their ISP blocking, slowing down, or redirecting internet traffic or prioritizing some sites or applications over others.
- ISPs control the basic infrastructure of the Internet with most Americans having only one choice for high speed access to the internet. This means a small handful of companies are gatekeepers to the entire web. When the FCC repealed net neutrality, it eliminated rules that ensure a free market for competition online where ISPs cannot block or throttle entire sections of the web or charge users more just to reach particular applications and websites.

The Open Internet Has Been Key for Small Business Growth

- The internet is amazing because it empowers entrepreneurs and consumers. Anyone can start a business and immediately reach a worldwide customer base for a fraction of what it would have cost just two decades ago.
- A free and open internet encourages a free and open market by giving small businesses and startups the opportunity to compete with big box stores, chains, and internet-only businesses.
- Businesses that reach customers online create millions of jobs and contribute over a trillion dollars to our nation's GDP.¹

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<http://internetassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Internet-Association-Measuring-the-US-Internet-Sector-12-10-15.pdf>.

ISPs Have Incentives to Exploit Customers and Track Records of Ripping Off Customers, Degrading Internet Traffic

- ISPs have the technical capacity to degrade and prioritize traffic and identify the sender and contents of data traveling on their networks.
- Without strong net neutrality rules, ISPs could charge subscribers for internet access and then double dip by charging the websites and applications that those subscribers use extra fees under threat of blocking or slowing the subscribers' access to the content or degrading the content so subscribers choose migrate to competitors.
- ISPs also have strong incentives to sell the fastest, priority access (e.g., internet "fast lanes") and subscriber exemptions to arbitrary ISP monthly data caps to businesses that can afford to pay the most to give themselves a critical advantage over competitors.
- Businesses that can't or won't pay for fast lanes would see their websites load slower for consumers, potentially driving those consumers away. This is most important for businesses using high bandwidth tools like video, photos, and live, real-time interaction.
- There are numerous documented instances of ISPs blocking applications that compete with their own services and giving affiliated content priority access to consumers.² Without net neutrality rules, those practices will likely be monetized on a large scale.
- ISP executives have long claimed they would like to charge businesses for access to ISP subscribers and have said they'd pursue pay-to-play arrangements as soon as the law didn't prohibit them.³
- ISPs have also begun to build services in new non-tech sectors where they can edge out competition by preferring their own services -- in sectors as diverse as home security or banking/financial services. Without net neutrality, the limit of this anticompetitive behavior is unknown.

Tell Congress to Pass the CRA to Restore Strong, Sensible Open Internet Protections

- The fight is not over! Congress has a tool called the Congressional Review Act (CRA) that allows Congress to override agency rules.
- The FCC's net neutrality rules were popular, worked well for the economy, and were upheld in court twice. There's strong bipartisan momentum to pass a CRA to restore net neutrality in Congress. Polling shows more than 8-in-10 voters oppose the FCC's repeal, and thousands of small businesses have asked keep net neutrality.
- **Urge your Senators and Representatives to support the CRA in order to restore strong net neutrality protections. There is overwhelming public support for keeping net neutrality. Contact your members of Congress and make sure they protect your interests!**

Visit Public Knowledge at:

<https://www.publicknowledge.org/act-now/tell-congress-to-use-the-cra-to-save-net-neutrality>

to take action to protect small business and fight the digital divide!

² <https://www.freepress.net/blog/2017/04/25/net-neutrality-violations-brief-history>.

³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/03/AR2005110302211.html>.