

Net Neutrality: What You Need to Know Now



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 you to share and access information of your choosing without interference.

But right now this win is in jeopardy: Trump's FCC chairman, Ajit Pai, wants to destroy Net Neutrality. In May, the FCC voted to let Pai's internet-killing plan move forward. By the end of the summer, the agency was flooded with more than 20 million comments. The vast majority of people commenting urged the FCC to preserve the existing Net Neutrality rules.

Time is running out: The FCC will vote on Pai's proposal on Dec. 14. [Join the millions](#) who have already spoken out against it.

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.

Without Net Neutrality, cable and phone companies could carve the internet into fast and slow lanes. An ISP could slow down its competitors' content or block political opinions it disagreed with. ISPs could charge extra fees to the few content companies that could afford to pay for preferential treatment — relegating everyone else to a slower tier of service. This would destroy the open internet.

What would happen if we lost Net Neutrality?

The internet without Net Neutrality isn't really the internet. Unlike the open internet that has paved the way for so much innovation and given a platform to people who have historically been shut out, it would become a closed-down network where cable and phone companies call the shots and decide which websites, content or applications succeed.

This would have an enormous impact. Companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon would be able to decide who is heard and who isn't. They'd be able to block websites or content they don't like or applications that compete with their own offerings.

The consequences would 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 would activists be able to fight oppression? What would happen to social movements like the Movement for Black Lives? How would the next disruptive technology, business or company emerge if internet service providers only let incumbents succeed?

Didn't we already win strong Net Neutrality rules?

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

But ever since then opponents have done everything they can to destroy Net Neutrality. And Chairman Pai — a former Verizon lawyer — is moving fast to destroy the open internet. **He must be stopped.**

Why is Title II so important?

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, giving internet users the strongest possible Net Neutrality rules when it reclassified broadband providers as common carriers under Title II. Title II gives the FCC the authority it needs to ensure that companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon can't block, throttle or otherwise interfere with web traffic. Title II preserves the internet's level playing field, allowing people to share and access information of their choosing. These rules have ushered in a historic era of online innovation and investment — and have withstood two court challenges from industry.

But Chairman Pai wants to ditch Title II and return the FCC to a "light touch" Title I approach. Translation: Pai wants to give control of the internet to the very companies that violated Net Neutrality for years before the FCC adopted its current rules in 2015. Title I would do nothing to protect internet users like you.

Who's attacking Net Neutrality?

Big phone and cable companies and their lobbyists filed suit almost as soon as the Net Neutrality rules were adopted. Free Press jumped in and **helped argue the case** defending the FCC — and on June 14, 2016, a federal appeals court **upheld the open-internet protections in all respects**. However, the ISPS are still trying to challenge these rules in court.

Meanwhile, industry-funded Net Neutrality opponents in Congress have done everything they can to dismantle or undermine the rules. Legislators have **introduced numerous deceptive bills** and attached **damaging riders** to must-pass government-funding bills.

The millions of people who spoke out in support of Net Neutrality are fired up and ready to fight back — and **you can join them here**.

Why is Net Neutrality crucial for communities of color?

The open internet allows people of color to tell their own stories and organize for racial and social 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. The lack of diverse ownership is a primary reason why the media have gotten away with criminalizing and otherwise stereotyping 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.

Net Neutrality lowers the barriers of entry by preserving the internet's fair and level playing field. It's because of Net Neutrality that small businesses and entrepreneurs have been able to thrive online.

No company should be allowed to interfere with this open marketplace. ISPs are the internet's gatekeepers, and without Net Neutrality, they would seize every possible opportunity to profit from that gatekeeper position.

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

What can we do now?

Chairman Pai wants to replace the agency's strong rules with "voluntary" conditions that no ISP would ever comply with. Pai unveiled his plan in a closed-door meeting with industry lobbyists in April 2017 and officially kicked off a proceeding on May 18, 2017, when the FCC voted along party lines to move this proposal forward. Since then the agency has been swamped by tens of millions of comments from internet users who want to keep the protections in place.

Pai is ignoring the public outcry, and the FCC will vote on his Net Neutrality-killing plan on Dec. 14. **Urge the agency to ditch this plan**, and **tell your members of Congress** to condemn Pai's attack on the open internet.

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