

What Is Network Neutrality?

Network Neutrality means that Internet service providers may not discriminate between different kinds of content and applications online. Net Neutrality guarantees a level playing field for all Web sites and Internet technologies.

Net Neutrality ensures an open Internet — it is the one guarantee that everyone on the Internet will have a chance to be heard.

An open Internet offers all Americans the opportunity to speak for themselves without having to convince large media companies that their voices are worthy of being heard. The Internet also helps people find jobs, get an education, connect to friends and family members around the world, and advocate for social change. Net Neutrality ensures that everyone has the same opportunity to find their voice online.

Net Neutrality promotes free speech and equality on the Internet.

Net Neutrality ensures that diversity of opinion and content flourishes online, preventing the kind of consolidation that has taken place in radio and television. The Internet provides people with the lowest barrier of entry to establishing an online media presence.

Net Neutrality keeps big companies from picking winners and losers online.

Phone and cable giants like AT&T and Comcast want to undercut online competition, favor their own content and services, and discriminate against others. The top executives of nearly every major phone and cable company have told the press and their shareholders they plan to block or degrade the content and services of their competitors. And they've been caught doing it: In 2007, Comcast blocked lawful file-sharing applications that competed with its video business until the FCC stepped in and forced the company to stop.

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Net Neutrality and the Digital Divide

Some claim that passing a Net Neutrality rule will widen the digital divide. Such arguments rest on the false assumption that Net Neutrality will deter investment by the big phone and cable companies in communities of color.

This is simply untrue. Neither should anyone believe that if phone and cable companies were allowed to discriminate, they would reverse their decades-long practice of failing to serve or ignoring the needs of marginalized communities while making huge profits. If they wanted to invest in closing the digital divide, they would have done so.

Increasing competition in the broadband market is the key to closing the digital divide and lowering prices for consumers. The main reason broadband costs too much and is out of reach for many Americans is because there's not enough competition and consumer choice — not because of Net Neutrality. Permitting discrimination by abandoning Net Neutrality won't lower prices, but it will diminish the number of diverse and independent voices online.

Who Supports Network Neutrality?

Many prominent leaders and organizations representing people of color have spoken out in favor of Net Neutrality.

“I will take a back seat to no one in my commitment to Net Neutrality.”

President Barack Obama

“An open Internet is, perhaps as much as anything else, ‘the great equalizer.’ It allows people with innovative ideas to succeed on the merit of those ideas. It also provides a voice to those who often are not afforded one. Smaller businesses can compete despite not being firmly established or well financed on day one. The quality of the product or opinion stands for itself, and consumers are the ultimate arbiters of which businesses thrive at the end of the day.”

FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn

“Americans have come to expect the Internet to be open to everyone. The Internet was designed without centralized control, without gatekeepers for content and services. If we allow companies with monopoly or duopoly power to control how the Internet operates, network providers could have the power to choose what content is available. Many of the innovations and products we use every day ... likely would never have developed in such a restricted environment.”

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.)

“To fully achieve the Internet’s potential, my constituents must have the freedom and unrestricted ability to communicate and interact with each other. This unfettered access to the Internet is an essential component for economic, social and political discourse.”

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.)

“Strong network neutrality protections are critical to guarantee online freedom for minority, rural, and other entrepreneurs to develop their businesses and reach new consumers, thereby contributing to overall economic growth.”

Rep. Donna Edwards (D-Md.)

“On behalf of our alliance, representing over 8,000 journalists of color, we urge the Federal Communications Commission to protect the openness of the Internet with strong Network Neutrality rules. We have a golden opportunity to avoid repeating the media’s mistakes of the past, and we must seize the moment.”

UNITY: Journalists of Color

“Rules that reinforce Internet openness and nondiscrimination will protect minority small business owners that conduct online operations and independent content producers that create three dimensional stories to depict people of color more accurately.”

National Hispanic Media Coalition

“The Internet offers a transformative opportunity to participate in a media system where we can truly control our own voice and image, and at the same time reach the largest number of people possible — all to the degree that our messages and actions resonate. The medium in its current state allows all Americans to speak for themselves without having to convince large media companies that their voices are worthy of being heard.”

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