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Digital Working Future

A guide to net neutrality

Net neutrality — the basics

No, wait! Don't close the tab! Net neutrality sounds boring, but it's actually a huge deal. In fact, the end of net neutrality has the potential to change how we use the internet forever.

In 2017, net neutrality made headlines when the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposed rolling back net neutrality protections. Under existing FCC regulation, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were required to treat all data equally, meaning they could not block, speed up, or slow down content delivery. Those protections were removed by the Trump-designated chairman of the FCC, Ajit Pai.

What American ISPs Can Legally Do Now

- Cut paid prioritization deals with tech companies, forcing them to pay more money to ensure their content is delivered to customers (e.g., pitting Netflix against Hulu and slowing down the lowest bidder, making their content unwatchable and driving them out of business).
- Sell internet packages similar to television packages: a social network package of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for \$6/month; a video streaming package of YouTube, Netflix, and Vimeo for an additional \$6; a music streaming package of Spotify, Apple Music, and TIDAL for an additional \$6.
- Create their own streaming services and slow down the speed of their competitors.
- Share web and search histories with advertising companies without having to get permission from customers first.
- Slow down all internet services at peak times of the day and charge customers extra for access to a “fast lane.”

What it means for Canada

The short answer is: we don't know yet. Canada's equivalent of the FCC, the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), operates with a certain level of independence from the government. That means its judgements don't need to follow party lines.

Additionally, in May 2018, the House of Commons passed a Private Members' Motion that explicitly calls on government to include net neutrality when reviewing the *Telecommunications Act* and the *Broadcasting Act* to ensure net neutrality protections are drafted into law.

But given the amount of digital content Canadians consume from American companies, Canada is likely to feel some repercussions. Canadians may be stuck paying higher fees to maintain their connection speed or to access the same content as before. Only time will tell, but Canadians should stay apprised of the issue (particularly as NAFTA negotiations unfold) and be ready to raise their voices should slowdowns occur.



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