



Media Minutes

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TRANSCRIPT

Prioritizing Internet Traffic – A Hidden Harm

One of the beautiful things about the Internet is that everyone using it gets treated the same -- whether you're uploading or downloading, streaming video or calling a friend, emailing your resume or researching used cars. This principle of no discrimination, known as Net Neutrality, is the main reason why the Internet has become as vast and as useful as it is today. But it should not be taken for granted.

Internet service providers like Comcast and AT&T want to get rid of Net Neutrality. They claim it hampers their ability to manage traffic when the Web gets congested. Some of ISPs' preferred tactics for Internet management, like blocking certain Web sites or speeding up their own services while slowing down their competition, have nothing to do with congestion and everything to do with making more money.

But there are other tactics that aren't as clearly defined as a breach of the Net Neutrality principle, like prioritizing Web traffic. ISPs want to speed up video and voice applications while downgrading others.

Chris Riley, policy counsel of Free Press, has written a paper with Robb Topolski of the New America Foundation that explains why so-called application bias ultimately works against Internet users – and undermines the overall health of the Internet.

Chris Riley: *What they're trying to do is use this concept of making video and voice work faster as a way to get the same kinds of control over the Internet that we've been fighting against all along. Any time an ISP is picking some applications to be sped up and others to be slowed down, they're at the same time picking others that get penalized. So what the ISP is doing here is really taking the choice out of the user's hands.*

Riley says there haven't been any conclusive studies saying that prioritization will make any difference in easing traffic congestion. Well-designed applications don't need prioritization to work well, he says. But if ISPs are allowed to prioritize, the incentive for making better products disappears.

Chris Riley: *What you're going to do is give a handout to some company that doesn't have as good of a product. And so you're again allowing the network operator to sort of skew competition and skew user choice.*

The FCC is currently making Net Neutrality rules that will officially define nondiscrimination. Riley says nondiscrimination should mean that ISPs cannot do anything that prioritizes traffic in a way that trumps what the users want and need. He says it's important for the FCC to keep its eye on the real goal – a world-class, high-speed Internet that helps drive the U.S. economy and brings U.S. citizens the communication infrastructure they need to lead productive lives.

Chris Riley: *The more ISPs are allowed to prioritize and discriminate among traffic, the less incentive they have to build a bigger pipe. And basically, what we want to do is create every incentive we can for the ISP to make a really big, fast Internet connection. And prioritization is a disincentive toward doing that.*

To read *The Hidden Harms of Application Bias* by Chris Riley and Robb Topolski, go to SavetheInternet.com.

Media Minutes Updates

Lou Dobbs Leaves CNN

On Wednesday night, Lou Dobbs announced he was leaving his nightly newscast on CNN. The cable channel's 7 p.m. anchor has drawn extensive criticism for his anti-immigrant views and for giving a platform to conspiracy theory claims that President Obama is not a U.S. citizen. Dobbs's departure comes nearly two full years before his contract was set to expire.

Earlier this fall, Presente.org and an alliance of local allies across the country founded BastaDobbs – a campaign devoted to educating the Latino community about “the threat posed by CNN's Lou Dobbs.” Another coalition, DropDobbs.com, which included large civil rights organizations and the watchdog group Media Matters, targeted Dobbs' advertisers.

BastaDobbs release a statement saying they were “thrilled that Dobbs no longer has this legitimate platform from which to incite fear and hate.”

Two Broadband Stimulus Windows Become One

In a move to expedite the federal government's efforts to expand high-speed Internet access across America, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Rural Utility Service announced that they would be combining the two remaining application windows for the \$7.2 billion set aside in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for broadband projects. This will leave applicants only one more chance to apply for funding.

The move comes in response to criticism that the funds are not being dispensed quickly enough. The first application window – which received 2,200 applications – closed in August. Those grants will be awarded in mid-December.

The agencies have requested public comment on what changes should be made to the grant requirements. The comment period will last two weeks, and will help establish the funding rules for the second window in early 2010. For more information at www.ntia.doc.gov.