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Google Public Policy Blog
Google's views on government, policy and politics

Finding common ground on an open Internet

Wednesday, October 21, 2009 at 6:15 PM ET
Posted by Eric Schmidt, Chairman and CEO of Google, and Lowell McAdam, President and CEO of Verizon Wireless

(Cross-posted on the Verizon PolicyBlog*.)*

Verizon and Google might seem unlikely bedfellows in the current debate around network neutrality, or an open Internet. And while it's true we do disagree quite strongly about certain aspects of government policy in this area -- such as whether mobile networks should even be part of the discussion -- there are many issues on which we agree. For starters we both think it's essential that the Internet remains an unrestricted and open platform -- where people can access any content (so long as it's legal), as well as the services and applications of their choice.

There are two key factors driving innovation on the web today. First is the programming language of the Internet, which was designed over forty years ago by engineers who wanted the freedom to communicate from any computer, anywhere in the world. It enables Macs to talk to PCs, Blackberry Storms to iPhones, the newest computers to the oldest hardware on the planet across any kind of network -- cable, DSL, fiber, mobile, WiFi or even dial up.

Second, private investment is dramatically increasing broadband capacity and the intelligence of networks, creating the infrastructure to support ever more sophisticated applications.

As a result, however or wherever you access the Internet the people you want to connect with can receive your message. There is no central authority that can step in and prevent you from talking to someone else, or that imposes rules prescribing what services should be available.

Transformative is an over-used word, especially in the tech sector. But the Internet has genuinely changed the world. Consumers of all stripes can decide which services they want to use and the companies they trust to provide them. In addition, if you're an entrepreneur with a big idea, you can launch your service online and instantly connect to an audience of billions. You don't need advance permission to use the network. At the same time, network providers are free to develop new applications, either on their own or in collaboration with others.

This kind of "innovation without permission" has changed the way we do business forever, fueling unprecedented collaboration, creativity and opportunity. And because America has been at the forefront of most of these changes, we have disproportionately benefited in terms of economic growth and job creation.

So, in conjunction with the Federal Communications Commission's national plan to bring broadband to all Americans, we understand its decision to start a debate about how best to protect and promote the openness of the Internet. FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski has promised a thoughtful, transparent decision-making process, and we look forward to taking part in the analysis and discussion that is to follow. We believe this kind of process can work, because as the two of us have debated these issues we have found a number of basic

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concepts to agree on.

First, it's obvious that users should continue to have the final say about their web experience, from the networks and software they use, to the hardware they plug in to the Internet and the services they access online. The Internet revolution has been people powered from the very beginning, and should remain so. The minute that anyone, whether from government or the private sector, starts to control how people use the Internet, it is the beginning of the end of the Net as we know it.

Second, advanced and open networks are essential to the future development of the Web. Policies that continue to provide incentives for investment and innovation are a vital part of the debate we are now beginning.

Third, the FCC's existing wireline broadband principles make clear that users are in charge of all aspects of their Internet experience -- from access to apps and content. So we think it makes sense for the Commission to establish that these existing principles are enforceable, and implement them on a case-by-case basis.

Fourth, we're in wild agreement that in this rapidly changing Internet ecosystem, flexibility in government policy is key. Policymakers sometimes fall prey to the temptation to write overly detailed rules, attempting to predict every possible scenario and address every possible concern. This can have unintended consequences.

Fifth, broadband network providers should have the flexibility to manage their networks to deal with issues like traffic congestion, spam, "malware" and denial of service attacks, as well as other threats that may emerge in the future -- so long as they do it reasonably, consistent with their customers' preferences, and don't unreasonably discriminate in ways that either harm users or are anti-competitive. They should also be free to offer managed network services, such as IP television.

Finally, transparency is a must. Chairman Genachowski has proposed adding this principle to the FCC's guidelines, and we both support this step. All providers of broadband access, services and applications should provide their customers with clear information about their offerings.

Doubtless, there will be disagreements along the way. While Verizon supports openness across its networks, it believes that there is no evidence of a problem today -- especially for wireless -- and no basis for new rules and that regulation in the US could have a detrimental effect globally. While Google supports light touch regulation, it believes that safeguards are needed to combat the incentives for carriers to pick winners and losers online.

Both of our businesses rely on each other. So we believe it's appropriate to discuss how we ensure that consumers can get the information, products, and services they want online, encourage investment in advanced networks and ensure the openness of the web around the world. We're ready to engage in this important policy discussion.

Labels: Net Neutrality

The comments you read here belong only to the person who posted them. We do, however, reserve the right to remove off-topic comments.

14 comments:

🅱 Concerned Netizen said...

This all looks pretty fishy to me, especially on the very day that Verizon's CEO gives a vitriolic speech in opposition to net neutrality, and the day that Canada passes a strong net neutrality framework. A few concerns:

"There is no central authority that can step in and prevent you from talking to someone else, or

Labels

that imposes rules prescribing what services should be available."
- Actually, the end-user ISP is positioned to do just that. That's the reason for this debate in the first place - ISPs can, and do, impose rules prescribing the available services. Comcast blocked P2P services; mobile ISPs continue to actively do this, with VoIP and other services. Google Voice itself is unavailable on many devices because there is one central authority with such power.

"Third, the FCC's existing wireline broadband principles make clear that users are in charge of all aspects of their Internet experience--from access to apps and content. So we think it makes sense for the Commission to establish that these existing principles are enforceable, and implement them on a case-by-case basis."
- Without adding a strong nondiscrimination principle - as the FCC has already said it would do - the four existing principles do not go far enough to prevent harm. Providers will be able to offer preferential treatment to their applications or anyone who will pay them, and even if they are required to allow "non-preferred uses", they will face strong incentives to make those uses slow and frustrating for consumers, to "encourage" application providers to pay for preferential treatment.

"flexibility in government policy is key." "Fifth, broadband network providers should have the flexibility to manage their networks..."
- Just as key as flexibility is clarity. How can service providers invest, and how can application developers create software, without clear rules of the road? "Flexible" is just another word for "toothless", because overly "flexible" rules create loopholes for armies of Washington DC lawyers to exploit, either at the Commission or in the D.C. Circuit when every single enforcement order gets appealed.

"don't unreasonably discriminate in ways that either harm users or are anti-competitive."
- This creates a burden on the user to show that the discrimination actually harmed them or is anti-competitive, problematic enough when considering enforcement. But when the harm is to innovation itself, then it is a harm to something that doesn't yet exist - so how can there be a showing of harm or anticompetitive impact? The very spirit of the Internet is that there be *no* discrimination - no interference with innovation - and a showing of "unreasonable discrimination" or clear harm is utterly inconsistent with that.

"They should also be free to offer managed network services, such as IP television."
- Are there any rules on these services whatsoever, or are they merely an alternative that allows every single misbehavior to take place, but by another name? How can these services possibly coexist with the open Internet?

Google, do you really mean this? What am I missing here?

OCTOBER 21, 2009 AT 8:27 PM

ⓑ patricia said...

Nice spin, Google. Make it about the user, and their choices. Yeah right. Google has no vested interest in the fact that it stands to loose greatly if carriers get an upper hand over provisioning on line. I support net neutrality, but this is a bunch of crap.

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Ⓑ Starfeeder said...

patricia are you retarded?

First off of course Google would lose if ISPs had free reign to block out 99% of the content on the internet to 99% of their users who would buy the cheapest plan possible instead of the $$$ plans that will let you see everything like you can now.

Google great job and keep it up! Net Neutrality for all.

Ⓑ Cliff said...

I think that in the wake of the banking crisis, and before that Enron and others like it, we have all learned that we cannot risk "trusting" the intentions of any company or set of companies, and sometimes cannot even trust the agencies that oversee them. Without some form of very substantial oversight that has robust transparency, and without a set of influential consumer groups that actively watch the activity of these companies, it is inevitable that the Internet would start to reflect the interests of these companies, and cease to be an open platform for democratic discourse and exchange of information. Net Neutrality: do we need it? You bet.

Ⓑ ltw said...

"flexibility in government policy is key."

Flexibility in government policy is an oxymoron.

Ⓑ BerkeleyBlog said...

You might want to check out the debate about net neutrality on The Berkeley Blog at http://blogs.berkeley.edu/category/economics/20091104/

Ⓑ Mortimer said...

Verizon? In favor of network neutrality? Then why do they do things like block Exchange clients on their mobile phone network unless you pay them *extra* on top of their regular data plans?

I pay for the "unlimited" data plan (which is in fact capped at 5GB/mo, but nevermind their false advertising; I'd be fine if they just said it was capped). I should be able to use that allocation of bits however I please, subject to legality, and not have them censor my traffic or extort extra money for particular applications.

The carriers and ISPs stand to make a lot of money if they do not have to remain network-neutral, both from users and from internet destinations and content providers.

Follow the money. Follow the corporate lobbyists. Not the lies that come out of the mouths of CEOs.

Ⓑ Berend Schotanus said...

IMHO the most relevant issue is: "what does the revenue model look like?" which remains unmentioned in this article.

You cab see the internet as a supply chain of two services: the communication service and the content service. The idea of Net Neutrality is that these two services remain independent of each other, which is a good idea. But the only way to achieve this ideal is to make sure both services have a viable revenue model, in its own right, without depending on each other. Short said, it requires that the consumer pays two separate bills for the two different services.

It sounds easy, I'm afraid it's not. Communication is an abstract service. A consumer has to understand what (s)he is paying for. Of course there is an interface between communication and content so the consumer has to understand the link between the two sides. A new vocabulary will be needed for that.

A hopeful development has been the emergence of the SIM-card in the GSM cellphone standard. It has allowed telecom providers to market their services independent of the hardware. A whole range of new concepts has emerged from that like "SIM-card", "SIM-lock", "prepaid", "phone credit", ... and some of these really help a consumer get a better appreciation of what the service he is receiving from the telco really is about. So providing smartphones without SIM-lock, as Google does, is really a good step.

I think, in order to achieve Net Neutrality, a lot of effort is needed in educating consumers so they can understand, assess and pay for the telecom services they need independent from the content.

Ⓑ Robodude288 said...

Caution this post may lack punctuation or contain rambling.

@Mortimer: I understand your frustration with VZW they have some questionable practices on something but ive been impressed with them recently.
just a thought Id like to point out about verizon's "unlimited" plans they ARE technically unlimited its not "capped" if it were capped they would kill your bandwidth the moment you went over similar to what satellite internet providers do they do not do this, you are welcome to use as much bandwidth as you like you just have to pay extra for anything over 5gb.

sure its not really justification but it does put it in a bit better light. also its not like they hide it its in those terms that you read (you did read them didn't you?) before you signed the contract.

I'm not saying I agree with it in fact as a power user It would be nice to have another teir i could step up to that is unlimited total transfer wise but I haven't ever gone over the limit and i

don't constrain my smart phone use by any means.

well there I go off topic on the whole net neutrality thing I get more and more uneasy about it the more they discuss it it started as a good idea in theory but is slowly warping in to this monster that's going to give us legislated monopolies and poor practices.

the funny thing is that net neutrality is meant to protect against something that hasn't arrived yet and I think that if it passes with holes or specific affirmative language it will just encourage net providers to adopt these practices.

Im not against net neutrality per say but im not sure im comfortable putting that kind of power with the FCC I'm not convinced they would stay on this side of the line in the sand. Can you say internet fairness doctrine?

DECEMBER 20, 2009 AT 11:12 PM

B Tech Guru said...

Google is not lily white in this debate either -- far from it. Remember, Google has thousands of miles of private fiber networks of its own, and yet is only lobbying for the telecomm carriers' networks -- not its own! -- to be regulated. This would mean that other content providers would be forced to operate over networks hobbled by regulation, while Google would not.

Google's millions of dollars of lobbying money (it also gave nearly a million dollars to the Obama campaign and then more to the transition fund) should not be able to buy it a leg up over competitors. Nor should it be allowed to "purchase" regulation that would harm all broadband users. Before casting stones at ISPs (who have *never* blocked legal content), take a good look at whose agenda you are supporting.

JANUARY 1, 2010 AT 4:27 PM

B Lost said...

I love how people compare ISP's to Google. Sure google has alot of control, however believe it or not they ONLY control what is on there own site. No one bitches about CNN being able to choose the advertisements on their site. If you dont like Google, DONT USE IT.
With net neutrality atleast you will have the choice. Without neutrality the ISP's can and will limit the traffic you are allowed to view. How can anybody actually be against limiting cencorship? Keep the Internet open. For those that want to blame google, think of this: What if your ISP limited all search results of ONLY google? They could! Would you be for the ISP making money however they want then?
Your argument is foolish

JUNE 16, 2010 AT 2:22 PM

B RVC PTAC said...

i'm sorry, but this is a corporate, "i know better then you do" situation. the internet does not need levels of service, it needs free enterprise, new ideas and should be a home to anyone that wants to do just about anything, as long as it does not hurt another party.

i am strongly against any restrictions for the internet by any company or government. i am not against government nor business, i am against someone telling me OR anyone what, how,

where i can use my computer use.

this is not for the good of the public, it's for the good of the corporation. profits are god, and this chasing of it at the expense of the public is just plain bad news for us, the users.

i am really sorry that the company that i thought, "did no evil" is supporting this.

AUGUST 9, 2010 AT 6:37 PM

panda said...

You have to have some comity to not allow viruses. It's true that nothing should be governed, but that's like saying that since America is a free country, you should be free to commit crimes. You have to not allow viruses, it's a better experience for the user.

AUGUST 10, 2010 AT 4:32 PM

Fe26Man said...

"...so long as (broadband network providers) don't *unreasonably* discriminate in ways that either harm users or are anti-competitive."

Why is is the word "unreasonably" required in this statement?

What does reasonable discrimination look like?

AUGUST 17, 2010 AT 2:21 AM

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