



Consumer Federation of America



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Contact: Mark Cooper, CFA 301-807-1623
Ben Scott, Free Press, 202-265-1490 x 25
Jennifer Fuson, CU 202-462-6262

New Survey: Consumers Want Congress to Protect Right to Access Information, Services on Internet

“Network Neutrality” Issue Needs Pro-Active Response from FCC, Congress to Ensure Consumers, Start-Ups Are Not Subject to Discrimination

FCC Commissioner Cops Calls for National Dialogue

(WASHINGTON, DC) — Two-thirds of Internet users have serious concerns about practices by Internet network owners to block or impair their access to information and services, and the majority of those surveyed support congressional action to prevent this practice, according to a new poll released today by consumer and public interest groups.

The nationally representative survey found that more than 75 percent of Internet users polled are seriously concerned about not being able to freely choose an Internet service provider or being required to pay twice for certain Internet services. Another 70 percent were concerned about providers blocking or impairing their access to Internet services or sites, such as Internet telephone service or online retailers like Amazon.com. Fifty-four percent want Congress to take action to ensure that Internet providers are prohibited from engaging in these practices.

“These results show that although consumers believe network owners *should* provide unfettered access to the Internet, few believe they’ll do so unless required by law,” said Mark Cooper, director of research at the Consumer Federation of America and co-author of the report issued by CFA, Consumers Union and Free Press. “Our findings that consumers view the Internet as an important communications and information service only underscore the danger of discriminatory network practices.”

FCC Commissioner Michael Cops appeared at the press conference where the poll was discussed and made a statement urging additional discussion, to give us a better understanding of how the policy choices made today will influence the coming broadband generation of Internet content, applications and services.

The results were released amid upcoming congressional consideration of legislation that would prohibit network owners from blocking or impairing consumer access to content and services on the Web — known as “network neutrality.” The groups said the Federal Communications Commission’s adoption of network neutrality principles last year fell short because the FCC refused to include enforcement mechanisms. Fueling the concern are recent reports that dominant network owners Verizon and AT&T intend to charge Internet content and services providers, like Google and Yahoo, fees for high-speed service in addition to Internet access fees charged to consumers.

“These pricing schemes are simply poorly disguised discrimination,” said Ben Scott, policy director of Free Press, the national, nonpartisan media reform group. “Requiring Internet companies to pay for high-speed access to the Internet when they’re already charging consumers for the same service means consumers will ultimately pay twice. Worse, the scheme will stifle innovation and competition by effectively denying access to start-ups that can’t afford to pay for access to high speeds.”

The groups called on Congress to swiftly move forward on meaningful legislation to prohibit network discrimination.

“Congress should enact tough new laws prohibiting cable and telephone companies from blocking consumer access to content and services on the Internet, bilking both consumers and Internet-based companies,” said Jeannine Kenney, senior policy analyst at Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of *Consumer Reports* magazine. “If they don’t, these big companies will use their market power to line their pockets by discriminating against competitors in favor of their own content and service offerings.”

The poll findings were based upon three nationally representative random sample surveys each consisting of 1,000 households commissioned by CFA in November 2005. Primary findings include:

- Nearly two-thirds of all households have access to the Internet, and a majority of those have high-speed or “broadband” access.
- Two-thirds of users say the Internet is important for personal communications and researching products; about 40 percent use the Internet for online banking, e-commerce, and retrieving government information.
- Nearly 90 percent of consumers say being forced to pay for an Internet service provider they did not want would be a serious problem.
- More than three-fourths of consumers say not being allowed to use the service provider of their choice would be a serious problem.
- A majority of respondents said blocking or slowing Internet services as a very serious problem.
- More than two-thirds of users agree cable and telephone companies should adhere to the stated network neutrality principles, yet only 47 percent expect them not to engage in problematic behavior.
- A majority of respondents support congressional action to uphold network neutrality principles and ensure access to all legal Internet services.

The report summarizing the survey results can be found at:

www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/net_neutrality_poll.pdf

www.hearusnow.org/networkneutralityreport