RIP Net Neutrality?

Net Neutrality Takes A Hit. Will Your Website Survive?

By David Evans, PhD, Ceatus Media, L.L.C.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently voted to end net neutrality. The controversial ruling has generated lots of questions about how the repeal will change the Internet as well as digital marketing of aesthetic practices.

The Big Picture

Net neutrality refers to the idea that all Internet traffic should be treated equally regardless of usage and bandwidth requirements. Under net neutrality, Internet service providers (ISP) such as Time Warner and ATT are not allowed to block, slow, or speed services or applications on the Web. It was enacted during the Obama administration to classify ISPs as utilities and deter them from developing discriminatory practices that would block or slow down certain content or from receiving payment to favor other content.

> *Google already penalizes sites with poor load times, so the undoing of net neutrality is another reason to have your digital marketing agency streamline your website files, reduce bandwidth requirements, and optimize load times, for both mobile and desktop versions.*

Under net neutrality, a grandmother who uses essentially no bandwidth by checking her email once a week is currently charged the same monthly rate as a sports enthusiast who can't get enough of those ESPN and Golf Channel video streaming highlights. On the corporate side, high bandwidth sites like Netflix, Facebook, and Amazon currently pay the same as low bandwidth sites with limited content.

Eliminating net neutrality would allow the ISPs to regulate the Internet by charging users based on usage.

Aesthetic practice websites are "below the radar" when ISPs evaluate bandwidth usage, because these sites are relatively small compared to Amazon or Netflix, and aesthetic sites don't typically require significant bandwidth usage through streaming.

But this doesn't mean your Web presence will be unfazed by the repeal of net neutrality.

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What To Do Now

If net neutrality goes away, the bandwidth consumption of websites needs to be more closely monitored and managed. High-bandwidth sites could take a hit, and sites with constant streaming may be penalized. If net neutrality is dismembered, then ISPs will have the ability to more closely regulate what type of content they carry through their fiber-optic pipes. A Time Warner ISP could, for example, penalize sites with nudity, just like Facebook now suspends accounts that show too much skin.

For these reasons, practice owners need to be highly cognizant of load speeds and bandwidth usage. That cool video that streams images of your office or your local skyline may not play well anymore. If ISPs start to regulate nudity, then before and after galleries will need to be rebuilt. Gathering before and after photos of patients in clothing, albeit minimal clothing, might be a proactive step. These "clothed" pictures could be added to the galleries now or in the future. Expect tools that measure website reach so practices can determine if their sites are being hit. Google already penalizes sites with poor load times, so the undoing of net neutrality is another reason to have your digital marketing agency streamline your website files, reduce bandwidth requirements, and optimize load times, for both mobile and desktop versions.

The Verdict?

The jury is still out on the fate of net neutrality. At press time, a Senate bill that would reverse the FCC decision to repeal net neutrality received its thirtieth co-sponsor, ensuring it will receive a vote on the Senate floor. Stay tuned for any developments that may affect your Internet marketing.

David Evans, PhD, MBA, is founder and CEO of Ceatus Media Group, a strategic-level digital marketing agency specializing in elective health care. Ceatus oversees the online marketing strategies of more than 75 premium eye-care practices in five countries. Contact him at dwevans@ceatus.com