

# 'Net neutrality' a growing concern

By Edmund Lee, Bloomberg

The Internet is a set of pipes. It's also a set of values. Whose? The people who consider it a great social equalizer, a playing field that has to be level? Or the ones who think of it as a marketplace subject to the laws of supply and demand?

It's a philosophical contest that's being fought under the banner of "net neutrality," a slogan that inspires rhetorical devotion but eludes precise definition. Broadly, it means everything on the Internet should be equally accessible – that the Internet should be a place where great ideas compete on equal terms with big money. Even in the contentious arena of net neutrality, that's a principle everybody claims to honor. Interpreting it is a different story.

With Internet use and related costs rising fast, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission proposed in May to let Internet providers like AT&T offer better technology at a premium price to content companies like Netflix, mainly for faster delivery of video. If approved, the new FCC rules would mean that for the first time some Internet content could get preferential treatment based on how much a publisher pays, instead of on whether it improves a network's technical efficiency. Critics said that would give deep-pocketed companies an unfair advantage over upstarts, stifling the development of a new generation of Googles and Facebooks, costing customers more and opening the door to corporate censorship.

Supporters said it would simply create a "fast lane," an improved alternate Internet where equals compete against equals.

Both sides invoked “net neutrality,” as do countries with widely varying definitions of the principle.

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