

# What Both Sides Are Missing About Net Neutrality



By Derrick Broze | [The Anti-Media](#)

**(ANTIMEDIA Op-ed)** *Washington D.C.* – On Thursday, protesters rallied outside the Federal Communications Commission as the agency voted to repeal “Net Neutrality” rules, which govern how Internet Service Providers treat data that travels over their networks. The rules state that ISPs cannot discriminate against or favor certain apps, sites, and services. Supporters of net neutrality fear the change will lead to ISPs charging more for internet services, or “throttling” web traffic to small, independent sites, potentially even alternative media. The FCC has said the repeal of the rules will help spur innovation in the long run.

*“This is not Thunderdome. The FCC is not killing the internet,”* Commissioner Brendan Carr [said](#) at the hearing on Thursday. *“We are not relying on market forces alone. We are not giving ISPs free reign to dictate your online experience,”*

he also said.

When developing the network neutrality rules, the FCC built on the concept of “common carriage,” which says all common pathways (waterways, roads, etc) should be open to all people without discrimination. Businesses may choose their prices, but they cannot discriminate against traffic.

The FCC first [adopted](#) the rules in 2010 as an effort to combat the apparent threat of ISPs throttling web traffic, specifically, throttling internet service for those attempting to download media from the internet. These rules were eventually [overturned](#) in 2014 after a legal challenge from Verizon. However, the FCC continued to develop rules for protecting what has come to be known as net neutrality. In 2015, the Obama Administration classified ISPs as public utilities similar to telephone service providers. This effectively put the relationship between ISPs and consumers back into the hands of the government via the FCC. As of Thursday’s vote, that is no longer the policy.

The supporters of net neutrality say the repeal of the rules means large corporations with deep pocketbooks could potentially pay broadband providers extra cash to ensure their sites and services stream in excellent quality while viewers of smaller sites could suffer from a lower quality internet experience. This would allow the big ISPs to charge higher prices because they would be able to absorb potential losses of customer revenue more easily than a smaller business or startup.

Of course, another segment of the debate argues that the repeal of net neutrality will not cause “The End of the Internet,” [as some have proclaimed](#), but rather, the absence of the rules could encourage ISPs to provide more customer-specific packages for accessing the internet and cable. For example, if your grandmother only gets online once a week to check email and scroll Pinterest, perhaps she does not need to

pay the same amount as the guy down the street who is always online and regularly uses cable television services. The argument is that now – without burdensome government regulation in the way – the ISPs will actually provide more diversity of services. Sure, some will charge higher prices for certain packages, but in the long run, the prices will come down because of competition.

Another perspective is that the focus should not be on fighting the big cable companies or the FCC, but on pushing back against regulation at the local level by fighting city governments and public utilities. *“The real bottleneck isn’t incumbent providers of broadband, but incumbent providers of rights-of-way,”* [a 2013 Wired opinion piece stated](#). *“These incumbents – the real monopolists – also have the final say on whether an ISP can build a network. They determine what hoops an ISP must jump through to get approval.”*

However, it seems that people on all sides of the debate are missing the point:

*Perhaps it’s time we focus on creating a truly decentralized internet that has no single point of failure or control.*

While the majority of internet users opt for the “mainstream” world wide web and communication systems, there are obvious reasons to pursue open source, decentralized solutions. The old systems rely on centralized networks and authorities. By using, supporting, and creating decentralized peer-to-peer networks, we help maintain the internet as a safe and secure place to share information and educate ourselves. What exactly would a decentralized internet look like? New ventures like MaidSafe, Nexus Earth, and the OpenNic Project are just a few of the examples of efforts that are beginning to stretch the boundaries of how we access the internet.

## **Decentralizing the Internet**

David Irvine is the founder of MaidSafe, or Massive Array of

Internet Disks, Secure Access For Everyone. The idea behind [MaidSafe](#) is to create a decentralized, distributed, secure, and private network. Irvine and his team have [worked for a decade](#) to develop the algorithms that will allow the network to be self-regulating by borrowing users free hard drive space. In return, they offer an anonymous high-speed internet and cryptocurrency.

How does it work? When a user logs into the MaidSafe network, their data is split into many pieces and distributed to computers on several different continents. Those pieces of data are then encrypted at a level higher than even the military's encryption. The MaidSafe platform also hopes to allow for ease of creation of applications for phones and computers. Further, MaidSafe promises an uninterrupted internet experience. By maintaining a distributed network dependent upon many users around the globe (rather than on a centralized network subject to attack or power failure), the network will be able to maintain a constant connection.

The eventual goal of MaidSafe is called 'vaults,' where users are able to contribute resources to the network (in the form of spare hard drive capacity) and earn a built-in cryptocurrency called Safecoin. This structure means that without central servers, there's no centralization of data in concentrated storage units. Data is also encrypted and the team hopes to eventually have a worldwide network of SAFE users accessing the internet via a distributed network.

## **Taking the Internet to Space**

Nexus Earth is a three-year-old project that combines private space flight, the internet, and cryptocurrency. The goal of their team is to launch rockets carrying cube satellites into space with the eventual goal of providing free peer-to-peer internet for everyone in the world. This will also include the first blockchain and cryptocurrency based in space. It's an ambitious goal, but the team behind it has a bigger picture in

mind. According to their [website](#):

*“Nexus seeks to Free humankind from centralized systems. Merely being decentralized is not enough. We must decentralize the decentralization. Using software and hardware, Nexus seeks to build the foundation for the most decentralized system to ever be developed: Nexus Earth. This network will empower everyone from the first world to the third world. Not everyone has money, but everyone has time. The time has come to decentralize everything. The foundations of cryptocurrency should be built upon decentralized principles. Nexus seeks to fulfill this mission.”*

The Nexus Earth website and the [white paper](#) of founder Colin Cantrell make it quite clear that the team has a desire to change the world and level the playing field for the average person. Cantrell says his goal is to create a “decentralized democracy” that will “Decentralize Decentralization, to where resources of computing and investment won’t be the ruler, but the ruling will be given to the people.” The team is currently building their rocket factory in Arizona and will begin testing rockets in 2018. The first satellites are scheduled to launch in 2020.

## **The OpenNIC Project**

When you access a site on the world wide web, you typically access it through a .com or .net web address. These are known as Top-Level Domains (TLD), the highest in the hierarchical system known as the Domain Name System. The organization behind the governing of the DNS and granting of web addresses is known as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN. It is, in fact, another aspect of the centralization of the internet that most people don’t know about.

[The OpenNIC Project](#) seeks to change this centralization and allow alternative access points outside the typical DNS. The project is described as a “user owned and controlled top-level

*Network Information Center offering a non-national alternative to traditional Top-Level Domain (TLD) registries; such as ICANN.”* This non-profit also provides access to domains not administered by ICANN. This means users could create websites not governed by this centralized authority and use OpenNIC to access such sites.

These ideas (and others) may be the ones that eliminate the effectiveness of government regulation, including net neutrality. They could also render any silly corporate takeover of communications largely pointless. Instead of expecting the United States government to hear our cries and save the internet, we should see this as an opportunity to create new ways of using the infrastructure of the internet and broadband services.

Of course, those who choose to remain in the corporate mainstream culture will be left with the dry, carbon copy versions of music, clothes, technology, and yes, the internet. But once the clamping down on individual expression and creation reaches a breaking point, the population will seek a better alternative. With the growth of peer-to-peer, open-source technology, it is only a matter of time before the internet expands into a number of different, competing webs of information.

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