

## Guest Column: The Internet is never neutral

By Mark A. Jamison and Janice Hauge

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Dumb is better? That is what net neutrality advocates would have us believe. Their basic belief is that broadband networks should be pipes that indifferently pass information packets from one location to another, allowing content providers and customers equal opportunity to do whatever they want. Who could be against that? People interested in innovation and customer welfare.

Remember [Al Gore](#) calling the Internet the information superhighway? The metaphor wasn't and isn't perfect, but it is instructive. Suppose we applied net neutrality to our transportation system — there would be no high-occupancy vehicle lanes during rush hour, no car-only lanes on interstates, and no toll road as an alternative to I-95 in South Florida. Transportation would be more costly and provide less value.

Forcing net neutrality would have similar results. Time-sensitive information, such as stock market transactions, would wait in line behind football game highlights.

If you are thinking that it sounds like net neutrality restricts innovation and hurts customers, you're right. Our research has shown that net neutrality limits innovation, contrary to the claims of the net neutrality proponents. How can this be? Imagine a one dimensional network — one that does nothing but carry information from point to point, which is how the old Internet has worked. What kinds of content providers flourish in that context? Those big enough to distribute their software across the net and those whose software takes advantage of the great bandwidth that they don't have to pay for.

Now, suppose that the network can offer enhancements that improve customers' experiences. Content providers whose sites would not benefit from such enhancements could ignore the offering. But there will be some content providers who could improve their services by buying the enhancements, such as priority packet delivery. These sites become better without net neutrality and offer customers more service. In other words, there is more innovation and greater customer welfare without net neutrality than with it.

Today's successful Internet sites face greater competition if we move beyond net neutrality principles. That probably explains why they are net neutrality's strongest advocates. But moving beyond a dumb network is better for customers, sites that find new opportunities and networks.

It should be no surprise that dumb isn't better. In an innovation driven economy, restrictions don't make us better. They hold us back.

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