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Net Neutrality Rules Are Needed

What COMPTTEL means when it calls for Net neutrality is reinstatement of the basic legal requirements that the Internet was founded on – nondiscrimination, interconnection on reasonable terms and conditions, service upon reasonable request, the right to attach devices to the network, and the right to innovate and provide service without having to obtain the permission of the network operator.

This is not to say that the network operator is without rights – many COMPTTEL members are themselves network operators, and in order to remain in business they all expect to be paid for their services. Under Net neutrality network operators are entitled to charge, on a non-discriminatory basis, for the transmission services they provide and to charge more for the use of larger amounts of bandwidth. These transmission services can include quality of service (QoS) guarantees or other network management services, so long as those services are offered to all consumers who wish to purchase them and do not discriminate among content providers. This means, for example, that a network operator could offer consumers who wish to get high definition (HD) video over the Net a service that provides QoS for all HD video, and that would be fine so long as all HD video the consumer seeks, as opposed to only HD video provided by persons the network operator has agreements with, is treated the same. Network operators are also entitled to offer consumers whatever content and other services they want.

What Net neutrality would not allow a network operator to do, however, is to favor the transmission of their own or affiliated content or services, to act as gatekeepers on who can provide content or services, to discriminate against unaffiliated content and services in the allocation of transmission capacity, or to force consumers to buy unwanted content and services in order to obtain basic transmission services.

Legislation to require Net neutrality is needed because the Federal Communications Commission has recently removed legal requirements from network operators that prohibited discrimination. As a result, network operators are being treated like cable operators, who can discriminate against unaffiliated content and services.