

Net Neutrality



What is net neutrality?

Net neutrality is the basic principle that **Internet Service Providers (ISPs)** should treat all lawful traffic traveling over the Internet the same. Under net neutrality principles, ISPs can't block or slow access to legal websites or online services, and they can't engage in "**paid prioritization,**" or charging websites and online services for better, faster access to users. Thanks to net neutrality, ISPs can't prioritize the traffic of their own services or the services of established incumbents with the deep pockets to pay for better access to use.

Key Takeaways:

- Net neutrality is crucial for startups and provides a level playing field on the Internet.
- Without net neutrality protections, ISPs can block, throttle, or charge more to prioritize Internet connection, disproportionately impacting small startups.
- Congress can restore the FCC's 2015 Open Internet Order which gave startups the protections they needed by passing the Congressional Review Act.

Why does it matter to startups?

Net neutrality is what keeps the Internet a level playing field, and these protections are especially crucial to the small and new companies that make up the country's startup ecosystem. Without net neutrality, startups that have an innovative product or service which competes with big companies—including the increasing number of services owned by or affiliated with ISPs— have to worry about paying more to have their websites or services load as fast as their competitors. These extra connection costs would make it harder for startups to attract funding and get off the ground.

Where are we now?

After years of failed attempts and legal challenges, in 2015 the FCC adopted strong net neutrality rules that changed the way it classified ISPs so consumers would be better protected. By changing how ISPs were regulated, the FCC cleared away much of the legal uncertainty that had loomed over previous iterations of net neutrality rules. Unfortunately, after a change in leadership following the 2016 elections, the FCC voted in late 2017 to repeal its new rules, leaving in place much weaker obligations for ISPs to merely disclose how they will treat Internet traffic.

In the wake of the FCC's action, Congress introduced a Congressional Review Act resolution that, if passed and signed into law, would restore the FCC's 2015 rules. That measure passed the Senate with a bipartisan vote of 52-47 earlier this year. In the House, 70 lawmakers signed on as co-sponsors of this legislation and 177 lawmakers signed a petition to bring the measure to the floor for a vote. The petition needs 218 supporters for the measure to reach the House floor for a vote.