

They Keep Using That Phrase, “Net Neutrality”

“Verizon Wireless was just caught in the act of what looks like a blatant violation net neutrality,” writes Kurt Walters of Demand Progress in a fundraising message to the Internet activist group’s email list. “Last week, without warning or permission from its customers, Verizon throttled bandwidth speeds down to 10Mbps. Users trying to stream video or use certain apps were caught in an internet slow lane and couldn’t do anything about it.”

I’ve written a number of columns on Net Neutrality. Quick recap: Underneath all the talk about preserving a “free and open Internet,” Net Neutrality is just a corporate welfare scam under which Big Content bandwidth hogs like Amazon, Google, and Netflix hope to redistribute the costs of building infrastructure to carry their content from their customers to Internet users in general. It’s a *dangerous* corporate welfare scheme (it enables Internet censorship by putting the FCC in charge of defining “legal” versus “illegal” content). It’s a *complicated* corporate welfare scheme (a friend in the telecom industry is trying to educate me on things like “peerage agreements” and such). But it’s just a corporate welfare scheme.

As the FCC considers repealing the 2015 Net Neutrality rule, its supporters are desperate to associate bad things with its absence. So desperate that Demand Progress is advertising *examples* of Net Neutrality as *violations* of Net Neutrality.

At least one Verizon customer tells me he thinks the whole throttling story is — I hate to use the term — “fake news.” He didn’t notice any slowdown. But if there was one, well, let’s see what the FCC says about that. From the Commission’s consumer guide to the “Open Internet,” aka Net Neutrality:

“Broadband providers may not deliberately target some lawful internet traffic to be delivered to users more slowly than other traffic.”

Demand Progress’s accusation is not that Verizon slowed down some traffic in order to speed up other traffic. The accusation, rather, is that Verizon slowed down ALL traffic on its network, for whatever reasons. In other words, Verizon treated all traffic equally — thereby acting in strict accordance with the Net Neutrality rule.

Yes, the alleged slowdown would have had a greater effect on apps and content that use more bandwidth. Getting an email slowly isn’t especially noticeable; getting high definition video slowly is VERY noticeable. That’s a predictable effect of Net Neutrality’s demand that all content be treated equally.

To put it a different way: Demand Progress’s complaint isn’t that Verizon violated Net

Neutrality. Demand Progress's complaint is that Net Neutrality inherently brings with it exactly the opposite of the result its advocates claim for it.

Moral of the story: Be careful what you wish for — and when you get it, don't complain about it.