

# How Independent Artists Could Lose Their Independent Internet

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In the past few months, there has been a fight in Congress over phone and cable companies' opposition to what is called "net neutrality." I know the business decisions of major companies can be a real snoozer. However, this is one decision that will truly affect independent artists and those that support their work. That's because "net neutrality" is really about discrimination by the phone and cable companies; if the phone and cable companies get their way, they would have the ability to control how independent artists reach the millions of Internet users and determine which artists succeed and which fail.

The Internet has become an extremely cost-effective way for independent artists (and when I say "artists," I mean that in the broadest sense, so it includes DJs, musicians, producers, actors etc.) to get their music and creativity out to the masses. Hitting the pavement and word of mouth have always been an option. But in recent times, as even the [New York Times](#) recognized, the Internet has allowed independent artists, with no major label support or monetary resources, to reach an audience and establish a following, and at times even sell records with some success.

That's because, these days, artists with broadband access to the Internet can reach millions of people and, potentially, develop a cult following. Artists do this by creating their own website or posting their talent on other websites, such as myspace.com. Even Warner Music has recognized that the Internet is a quick and cheap way to find and distribute new artists; [Warner Music](#) has decided to create a new recording label that would use only the Internet to distribute music.

We as users have also benefited, having to rely less on what radio and television stations determine what we watch and listen. Instead, if we are unimpressed (or just plain old tired) with the music we are hearing on the radio or the videos we are watching on TV, we can turn to the Internet to find a different variety of artists. We instantly can log-on to any site, no matter who owns or hosts the site, and watch, listen to, or download whatever tune catches our ears or eyes.

That could drastically change. The beauty of the Internet right now is that no matter who you are, artists have a cost-effective way to get their talent and message to Internet users. And the users can get to the artists' talent and message. But, without "net neutrality," unless artists have the

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money to pay the Internet service provider, artists may no longer be able to reach their fans and other Internet users.

Here's why: the phone and cable companies are considering charging content providers, such as artists who provide audio and video files on their sites, an extra fee to get their music (whether it be audio or video) in a "fast lane." That means those who pay up get to have their music, videos, or whatever content you may have to offer travel in the fast lane. If not, you'll end up in the "slow lane" with everyone else.

If this weren't bad enough, phone and cable companies could also enter into exclusive deals. That means the phone and cable companies will only offer the fast lane option to certain preferred content providers. In other words, if the phone and cable companies don't offer you a deal, even when you have the resources to pay up, you'll still end up in the slow lane with everyone else.

It's also important to recognize this is also very different than having to pay extra to get a greater speed of bandwidth. People will try to confuse you about this. Right now, once a user pays for his or her bandwidth, that user can do whatever he or she wants with it; and independent artists have done just that. They've used that bandwidth, either themselves or in collaboration with others, as a means to promote and deliver their musical product to other Internet users.

Now, the phone and cable companies want to double-dip into the artists' pockets. They not only want to charge artists for the bandwidth into the home, but they also want to charge artists a fee (or what to me sounds more like a kickback) so that the artists can have their content travel over the fast lane. So, assuming the phone and cable companies are willing to make a deal with you, what are the benefits in paying the kickback to get into the fast lane?

If you've paid to get your website in the fast lane, any user that tries to access your site is guaranteed to have no issues downloading your site, viewing a music video and/or listening to an audio file that the user may be attempting to get. By no issues, I mean slow or delayed connections to your site because you're trying to fight the congestion on the slow lanes. Imagine the user's experience if every time he or she tried to access your website, the download time was slow and delayed. If you haven't paid up and are stuck in the slow lane, the user will at least get to

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you, eventually, unless they can get to someone else faster or they just give up trying to reach your site.

Here's an example of how this could play out. Warner Music, with a new online based label, most likely has the funds to pay to play in the fast lane. So, if a user is curious about any of Warner Music's new artists and wants to check out some of their music, the user would have no problem loading the site or downloading any audio or video off of the site. The user can instantaneously get to the site and in a matter of seconds download the audio or video.

But, as one of the owners of an independent record label, [Propa Gandaz Music Group](#) ("PGZ"), I can say with certainty that PGZ does NOT have the funds to pay to play in the fast lane. So, a user decides to check out our site to sample some of the audio and video on our artists. However, since we are relegated to the slow, congested lane, it takes a few minutes to download the site and an even longer time to download audio or video. Depending on the patience and dedication of the user, either the user will wait it out, or decide it's just not worth the trouble, especially since they can just head over to Warner Music's site.

What if one day PGZ actually has the resources to get in the fast lane? Unfortunately, there is still the possibility PGZ will be forced to travel in the slow lane. That's because a company like Warner Music may have signed an exclusive deal, which prohibits other labels from accessing the fast lane.

Right now, any user can get to any site, without any discrimination, by way of these kickbacks, taking place. There are no fast or slow lanes. That why, on the Internet, the artist at least has a chance and is judged by his or her talent. That's not necessarily how airplay on radio and TV work - not every artist has a chance to get some airplay.

There are some who want Congress to pass laws that would make sure the Internet stays as it is, so the phone and cable companies cannot charge content providers for travel in a fast lane. But the phone and cable companies are fighting hard against such a law, and right now, they seem to be getting their way.

That's why we need to fight, too. Let your Senators and Representatives in Congress know you care about this issue. Let them know you don't

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want the phone and cable companies deciding who gets preferential treatment and who gets discriminated against. Let them know that it's you, the artist and the audience, that makes the Internet so valuable and diverse, not the phone and cable companies.

Yes, in many cases boardroom decisions can be a snoozer. But, if there is ever a time you should wake up to the decisions being made by the phone and cable companies, its now.

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