

It's Important To Know About Net Neutrality

By Scott Wolpov

The Internet is no longer a "new" means of communicating. It has matured into a force that has changed the world. The original unwritten rules allowed any person access to any other computer on the Internet. You were limited only by your connection speed. This created a true democratic utopian environment. There were no limits to who could view a web site and how often. In the brick and mortar world it was your location that mattered.

The Internet is different; there are no locations, only domain names. Everyone has the access to the same population. This is called Net Neutrality.

At first, people connected to the Internet via small companies that offered dial-up connection to their servers, which would then connect to larger bandwidths access to the Internet. These companies were soon consolidated into companies like Earthlink and AOL. Today telephone and cable companies offer high-speed access to the Internet to most of the country.

Ten years ago the Internet was comprised of simple web pages. The web sites of today are more complex. You can play games, make phone calls and download your favorite movies and shows. You can get your music delivered by the song to many different devices. A cell phone can connect to the Internet. All of this consumes large amounts of the capacity of your bandwidth connection,

and bandwidth costs money.

This great and equal access has allowed new companies like: Amazon, eBay, YouTube, Google, MySpace, Vonage and many others to become part of the new economy. It also has allowed any company to compete on the same level as the big companies. One of my businesses, discountjewelry.com has the same access to the same customers as bluenile.com. This has created a truly level playing field. Many companies would not have existed if not for this fact.

The companies that now provide most broadband access feel it is unfair that they have to give equal access to their competitors.

You may have X Phone Company DSL, but use Skype to make free phone calls. X Phone Company feels this is unfair. After all, they want you to use their paid telephone service. These companies feel they should have the right to prioritize what you download, at what speeds and when you are able to do it. The feeling is that it is no different than a toll road. They charge more for trucks because they use more of the highway. There is some logic to that argument.

The web site companies, who provide content, feel that is unfair. They will be relegated to second-class status unless they pay premium prices for the better access. Consumers feel that they will lose their choice of what sites they can use. It will be like cable TV, where the provider decides what channels are most profitable to them.

The cable and phone companies want to create a new regulatory body, run by them, that would determine what content gets to you first and at what speed. This could mean that a company could block your access to another company's site if they compete.

Cable and Phone Companies Point of View: We have spent billions creating a broadband high-speed access for our clients. It is our property. Other companies want to use our property to sell their wares. These companies are not paying for this. Why should we subsidize these ventures? If they want to sell their products, we should be compensated.

Content Creators Point of View: The cable and phone companies already get paid from their subscribers. They determined the amount the market can bear and have priced accordingly. What difference does it make what type of data goes through the connection? The companies are free to charge by bandwidth. Setting priorities is censorship and restraint of trade. The consumer should dictate how they want to use their bandwidth.

The issue of Net Neutrality is very important and will affect our economy. It is important to learn all the details, form an opinion and let your representatives know your feelings and choices.

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Members Respond Favorably To Chamber Survey

During the month of February, the Chamber undertook a member satisfaction survey. The survey was sent out via e-mail, was available on our web site, was included in our Queensborough Magazine and was sent via the mail to all of our members.

In total, 146 surveys were returned. While this may be a small response rate and no claims are made that the survey methodology was perfect, the results yielded are helpful to our leadership in understanding what makes our members join or renew and most importantly, what the Queens Chamber can do better.

Demographically, our respondents were representative of our population. Forty-six percent of those answering have been members for less than five years. Company size was split almost evenly between those with 10 or fewer employees, 11-50 employees and more than 51 employees.

Respondents also crossed industry sectors with 16 percent retail, 24 percent commercial, 35 percent professional, 21 percent educational or not-for-profit and the balance industrial. These people

joined the Chamber for a variety of reasons from attending an event or being introduced by a friend, while some have been members for generations.

We asked about Chamber services and whether they are important to your business, and if you were satisfied with them. Our Value Plus Affinity Program, for example, was only well received by 28 percent, while another 50 percent were either somewhat or very unhappy with it. Member to member benefits also drew negative opinion with over 54 percent expressing negative views on the program.

More positively, business information seminars and business card exchanges garnered very strong support with nearly 75 percent of those responding considering them both important and well done. We also learned that nearly a quarter of our membership aren't aware of some of these programs.

In terms of other Chamber resources, feelings were mixed. For the most part (67 percent), members were satisfied with our monthly Queensborough Magazine. Conversely, almost the same

number of people (64 percent), were disappointed with our web site.

However, it was also nice to learn that more than 78 percent of members were very happy with our staff with only 3 percent having an unfavorable opinion.

Chamber members ranked many topics as being important to them. At the top of the list were business development and economic incentives, followed closely by legislative issues and the environment. Rounding out the list were education and workforce development and health insurance. This is particularly important information as we shape our agenda.

In the end, an overwhelming majority of respondents said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their Chamber membership, would recommend the Chamber to a friend and plan on re-joining. Only a small handful responded negatively to those questions.

Maybe the most surprising responses came to the question of how Chamber members prefer to receive communication from the Chamber. Twelve percent chose fax, while 22 percent picked postal mail, and nearly two-thirds (64 percent)

selected e-mail. However, in a twist of irony, 82 percent of surveys were returned via mail or fax and only 18 percent were returned electronically.

Several additional comments talked about the Chamber's need to increase their outreach efforts, create an affordable health program and concentrate on increasing member benefits and membership value.

Some of those steps have already been taken while others will happen during the next few months. This is your Chamber and we take your feedback seriously.

The Membership Committee, chaired by Ken Koenig and Sonia Lugo want to thank all those who responded to our questionnaire and congratulate the winners who were chosen from the pool of members who returned their surveys on time. They are:

Rhona Magelowitz of Station Square Inn Apartments – Night on the Town

Mark Brenner of Marbren Tire Co. – Ticket to "Day at the Races"

Jaelyn Miccio of AM Exclusive Business Machines – Luncheon Ticket for Business Expo

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Chamber website at
www.queenschamber.org**