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AP: Comcast Blocks Some File-Sharing

Network-Neutrality Backers Add Fuel to Fire

By [John Eggerton](#) -- *Broadcasting & Cable*, 10/19/2007 12:33:00 PM

AP reported Friday that it had tested [Comcast's](#) Internet access service and concluded the network "actively interferes" with some peer-to-peer file sharing online, saying that it appeared to be "an aggressive way of managing its network to keep file-sharing traffic from swallowing too much bandwidth and affecting the Internet speeds of other subscribers."

Comcast countered that it had not been blocking access or applications to any applications.

"Comcast does not block access to any Websites or online applications, including peer-to-peer services like BitTorrent," said Comcast spokeswoman Jennifer Khoury. "Our customers use the Internet for downloading and uploading files, watching movies and videos, streaming music, sharing digital photos, accessing numerous peer-to-peer sites and thousands of applications online. We have a responsibility to provide all of our customers with a good Internet experience and we use the latest technologies to manage our network so that they can continue to enjoy these applications."

Comcast was criticized two weeks ago by [network-neutrality backers](#) for what they said was cutting off, without warning, customers who were "using too much capacity."

Comcast spokesman Charlie Douglas was not available to comment on the AP finding, but he said at the time that while the cable operator does not explicitly inform customers of bandwidth constraints, it does contact a fraction of a percent of users and gives them the choice of cutting their usage or upgrading to a T-1 line so that they do not negatively impact the service of other residential customers.

"The customers who are notified of excessive use typically and repeatedly consume exponentially more bandwidth than an average residential user," Douglas said, "which would include, for example, the equivalent of sending 256,000 photos per month, or sending 13 million e-mails every month (or 18,000 e-mails every hour, every day, all month). In these rare instances, Comcast's policy is to proactively contact the customer via phone to work with them and address the issue or help them to select a more appropriate commercial-grade Comcast product."

The Internet Access Coalition earlier this month asked Congress to look into several reports of questionable network practices, including by Comcast, [AT&T](#) and [Verizon Communications](#), hoping to open a new front in its battle for mandatory network-neutrality rules.

[Media Access Project](#) criticized Comcast and took the opportunity of the AP story to make a pitch for network neutrality.

"When a broadband provider can deliberately disrupt traffic without telling subscribers, no one's content is safe," MAP senior vice president [Harold Feld](#) said. "Comcast's actions to target BitTorrent traffic without telling customers interferes with the many legitimate users who pay extra for broadband connections so they can move large files they have every legal right to send."

Feld added, "Comcast is fond of saying that network neutrality is 'a solution in search of a problem.' Today's revelation makes it clear that there is, indeed, a real problem. Fortunately, we have a solution -- it's called network neutrality."

MAP and others have been pushing the Federal Communications Commission and/or Congress to mandate network neutrality, which they said would prevent networks from discriminating against software or services on the Internet. Networks countered that they need to be able to prioritize traffic to prevent bottlenecks from bandwidth-hungry Internet-video applications.

[Public Knowledge](#), another group pushing for government oversight of network-management practices, wasn't far behind in calling for legislation.

"This is the latest in a series of bad examples of how big broadband companies are treating consumers and abusing their power," president Gigi B. Sohn said in a statement. "Comcast has already been exposed for setting secret limits on how much bandwidth consumers can use, and then cutting them off. Now Comcast has been shown to use hackerlike technology to cut down on all types of peer-to-peer traffic, again without telling consumers what the company is doing."

Sohn added, "It's clear that the policymakers who kept saying, 'Wait until there's a problem' before acting on legislation to keep the Internet free and nondiscriminatory have to wait no longer. We have a problem, and it's time to act on it."