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Behind the scenes of today's historic net neutrality protest

The Internet Wide Day of Action to Save Net Neutrality started with a Google Doc.



Andrew Wyrich Layer 8

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Today's protest that aims to save [net neutrality](#) started with a Google Doc.

It now spans the internet—including to Google itself.

Digital rights activists say they watched in horror as the Republican-led Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began efforts to rescind the [Open Internet Order of 2015](#) once President [Donald Trump](#)'s administration began to assert its policy agenda.

The FCC's 2015 order solidifies net neutrality protections under federal policy, without which, opponents of the FCC's decision say, the internet would lose its level playing field built upon this bedrock principle of the internet since its earliest days.

Without net neutrality, its proponents say, internet service providers (ISPs) are free to treat data with reckless abandon, allowing them to favor some sites or online services over others—for example, to slow down [Netflix](#) in favor of a streaming service that, say, [Comcast](#) created.

Reviving the internet's political awakening

As new FCC Chairman Ajit Pai, a former Verizon lawyer, began [his efforts to dismantle the net neutrality policies](#) enacted during President Barack Obama's term, activists began to scramble for ideas of how to harness the millions of people online who believe in net neutrality—and to convince anyone who would listen to fight like hell to keep it protected.



Some of the websites people visit every day—[Netflix](#), [Amazon](#), [PornHub](#), [Vimeo](#), [Reddit](#), and many others—are alerting their users and customers to what net neutrality is and why it allows them to use the internet the way they are accustomed to. A group of more than 130 online video creators, including major YouTube stars like Hank Green, Mindy McKnight, and Benny Fine, wrote a letter to the FCC saying a repeal of the Open Internet Order would “[have an outsized impact on our field and jeopardize our livelihood](#).”

Evan Greer, the campaign director for [Fight for the Future](#), an internet advocacy organization that helped launch the day of action, said many of the people involved with the protest are working in co-working spaces or from laptops in cafes or homes.

“We sort of see ourselves as the community organizers of the internet,” Greer says during a recent phone interview, adding that her laptop was banged up after it fell off of a bike. “It was clear to us that we needed one of these massive moments, where the entire internet comes together... where all of my favorite websites that I know and love are telling me that they might not exist without this basic level of protection. We knew we were going to need one of these moments.”

Greer says activists built upon the infrastructure created in the fight against [the Stop Online Piracy Act in 2012](#), arguably the moment the internet realized its political power. Launching from this foundation, they were able to quickly organize and brainstorm ideas of how to send a message to as many people as possible. The momentum for today’s online protest was, Greer says, “palpable” among the participating groups. She couldn’t remember a protest that came together as quickly as the Internet-Wide Day Of Action To Save Net Neutrality.

While getting different organizations, web platforms, and internet-reliant companies involved was relatively easy, there was one thing that Greer says did give organizers pause: the name. After some brainstorming, it became apparent the protest was quickly forming its own name: a day of action.

“That’s what people are calling it, so let’s let the internet decide,” Greer says.

[#Netneutrality](#) preserves the freedom of information we all enjoy online. Say no to Internet censorship: <https://t.co/acWilZNAGd>
pic.twitter.com/h2gqGNPtWv

— Fight for the Future (@fightforthefttr)
July 4, 2017

‘Democracy at work’

The diverse mix of organizations and companies coming together to plan a large internet-wide protest was a perfect example of “democracy in action,” Malkia Cyril, the executive director and founder of the [Center for Media Justice](#) says.

While many of the groups involved come from different backgrounds, advocate for different causes, and may not all be non-profits, Cyril said they joined forces



communities have been able to come together, find common ground, and really use this platform—we're able to use the internet to fight for the internet.”

All of the meetings, conversations, phone calls, and Slack channels between all of the groups as they organized a coordinated message for the online protest was “democracy at work,” Cyril says.

“It’s not just about companies. We needed to make it clear: This is not a battle between large and small companies—this is actually a battle between the largest of the large companies and everyone else,” she says.

For smaller internet companies like [Vimeo](#), the decision to join the day of action protest was an easy one, said Michael Cheah, the general counsel for the video-streaming company.

Without net neutrality, he says, Vimeo’s users would not be able to grow their audiences and have their work reach the same audience it does now. Cheah called the organizing behind the protest “very organic,” which made Vimeo joining the cause easy.

“We’re in a video space, so we are directly impacted by anything that involves the slowing down or speeding up of the internet,” he says. “If our users’ videos are slowed down because of our competitors, we’re not going to be reaching the audience that we reach today.”

Vimeo will display a banner directing people to file comments on the FCC website, push notifications, in-house ads, and have videos that show people why net neutrality is important. The goal, Cheah says, is to [alert people who may not know what net neutrality is](#) to realize its importance and decide it is worth fighting for.

“For people that may not be as engaged in this issue, this might be the first time they are seeing this,” he says of net neutrality. “The hope is to get them engaged and to file something with the FCC.”

The day of the protest matters: On Monday, the FCC will stop collecting public comment on their proposal to switch ISPs to be regulated under Title I of the Communications Act, instead of [Title II](#), effectively killing net neutrality protections for consumers and reverting ISPs to a less strict form of classification. Under Title I, FCC would not be able to force ISPs to abide by its net neutrality rules.

If the protest goes off as seamlessly as its orchestration, organizers say they feel as if the internet’s voice can make a difference.

“It’s all about creating the idea, and giving people a sense of their power,” Greer says. “Now, this thing has legs of its own.”

[Click here](#) to tell the FCC what you think about its plans to erase your net neutrality protections.

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