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Canadian ISPs Plan Net Censorship

Concerns grow that Canada's plan will wipeout alt news sites and spread to U.S.



By Mike Finch

A net-neutrality activist group has uncovered plans for the demise of the free Internet by 2010 in Canada. By 2012, the group says, the trend will be global.

Bell Canada and TELUS, Canada's two largest Internet service providers (ISPs), will begin charging per-site fees on most Internet sites, reports anonymous sources within TELUS.

"It's beyond censorship, it is killing the biggest ecosystem of free expression and freedom of speech that has ever existed," I Power spokesperson Reese Leysen said. I Power was the first group to report on the possible changes.

Bell Canada has not returned calls or emails.

The plans made by the large telecom businesses would change the Internet into a cable-like system, where customers sign up for specific web sites, and must pay to see each individual site beyond a certain point. Subscription browsing would be limited, extra fees would be applied to access out-of-network sites. Many sites would be blocked altogether.

"We had inside sources from bigger companies who gave us the information on how exclusivity deals are being made at this moment between ISPs and big content providers (like TV production studios and major video game publishers) to decide which web sites will be in the 'standard package' offered to their customers, leaving all the rest of the Internet unreachable unless you pay extra subscription fees per every 'non-standard' site you visit," Leysen said. "We knew the source to be 100% reliable, but we also knew the story would be highly controversial if we released the information. We did it because we knew that we'd get more official confirmations once we'd come forward with it. And indeed that is what happened. Dylan Pattyn, who is writing the soon-to-be published article for *Time Magazine*, received confirmation from sources within Bell Canada and TELUS after we released the information."

The plans would in effect be economic censorship, with only the top 100 to 200 sites making the cut in the initial subscription package. Such plans would likely favor major news outlets and suppress smaller news outlets, as the major news outlets would be free (with subscription), and alternative news outlets, like AFP, would incur a fee for every visit.

"The Internet will become a playground for billion-dollar content



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providers just like television is,” said Leysen. “It won’t be possible for a few teenagers in their parents’ basement to start a small site like E-bay that then grows out to be the next big thing anymore. Right now the Internet belongs to those with the greatest ideas. In the future, it’ll belong to those with the biggest budgets.”

With plans in Canada uncovered, I Power thinks that companies in the United States and other nations are also planning similar actions.

“By 2012 ISPs all over the globe will reduce Internet access to a TV-like subscription model, only offering access to a small standard amount of commercial sites and require extra fees for every other site you visit. These ‘other’ sites would then lose all their exposure and eventually shut down, resulting in what could be seen as the end of the Internet,” Leysen said.

Such a subscription plan could possibly restrict free speech far beyond even the current restrictions set by the governments of communist China. Not only would browsing be limited, but privacy would be invaded, as every web site viewed would likely be recorded on a bill in a manner similar to a phone bill.

Why would the ISPs institute such a plan? One word: money.

“This new subscription model is commercially far more beneficial to them than how it is now,” Leysen said. “If Fox wants to launch a new television show online, they’ll have to pay big money to all major ISPs to ensure that their new show will be offered and pushed in the ‘standard package’ of sites/services/channels that people will get through their Internet access. Plus ISPs will also gain extra revenue out of people trying to access the rest of the Internet, as they’ll pay extra subscription fees for every web site they visit.”

But it’s not just the big ISPs that stand to gain.

“Marketing and big budget ‘content-pushing’ just doesn’t seem to work on the Internet, and this is something that several industries want fixed. ISPs know this and will benefit greatly by fixing this for the marketing and entertainment industry,” Leysen said.

The ISPs are said to be confident they can institute such plans through deceptive marketing and fear tactics.

“The Internet will be more and more marketed as a place full of child pornography and other horrible illegal activity in order to get people on their [the ISP’s] side once they start restricting it and make it ‘safer,’” Leysen said. “Unless we really make a stand for this and make sure that mainstream media thoroughly covers the issue, the whole thing will be eased in with proper marketing to make sure that most mainstream customers won’t make a big deal out of it. They will only realize what was lost long after it’s gone.”

For more information about this story see <http://ipower.ning.com>

For more information about Internet freedom: savetheinternet.com

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