

Neutered net-neutrality and Diameter signaling



Susan Becker, 2014-13-02

Some parts of the media and concerned internet users are up in arms about the recent ruling on the FCC's net-neutrality regulations, preventing the agency from ensuring that all web traffic is treated equally. Their concern is understandable. No one wants to be in a situation where service providers routinely throttle traffic based on commercial agreements or even political views. The nightmare scenario is that ISPs become de facto dictators of the internet and control the flow of information unimpeded.

However, if handled sensitively, there is a great opportunity for service providers to make use of policy enforcement and Diameter signalling management solutions to enhance the quality of service to users. There are always mobile consumers who would be very willing to pay for ensured quality as their communications are of premium value to them. Yet, although service quality is one thing, they are not interested in a service provider influencing the content that they view.

And their fears aren't entirely unfounded, particularly when we look at how operators have treated OTT services in the past – throttling traffic that was competitive to their own offers. However we have seen, anecdotally at least, that service providers are starting to take another look at OTT services as potential partners; either to attract customers with bundled subscription deals (for example Spotify premium membership) or for revenue sharing deals. It's this approach which I think is more indicative of which way service providers will fall on their treatment of net-neutrality.

Imagine, for example, that you frequently use mobile Skype video calls for work purposes. Unfortunately Skype calls do occasionally lose resolution or drop out altogether, which would be a terrible experience and loss for businesses and consumers that depend on it. For subscribers in this position it may be worth the extra expense to ensure that Skype data is treated differently to the rest of the data they use. Paying for assured quality of service (QoS) can make enormous sense for some services without deliberately hindering other data.

Paying for a premium service which guarantees a higher Quality of service according to a specific paid-for policy is made possible by a combination use of Diameter signalling controllers and policy enforcement.. In conjunction, they enable the network to identify the subscriber and level of policy, and ensure the subscriber receives the quality of service provisioned for. An approach like this is a compelling value proposition for subscribers and provides a strong business case for service providers while, at the same time, respecting the central principles of net-neutrality.

Net-neutrality is an important concept for a censorship free and open internet, but there is no reason that it cannot co-exist as a philosophy with the benefits that enhanced quality of service can provide.

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