



“Blocking VoIP Calls: Foreboding Harbinger or Benign Fluke?”

Troubling Precedent May Inhibit Innovation

EDUCAUSE is troubled by the decision of some broadband providers to purposely block ports carrying VoIP traffic. We feel it sets a bad precedent when transport providers block any Internet traffic they view as “competing” or that does not correspond with what they may view as “appropriate” content for a particular community.

Interrupting IP traffic runs contrary to the spirit of the Internet and will have severe consequences on its development and use. Voice is only one of myriad applications that can be supported seamlessly and with greatly enhanced functionality over a robust Internet transport infrastructure. The higher education and research communities rely on open access of Internet traffic to facilitate learning and innovation, elements essential for our nation’s growth and for maintaining a leadership role in the global economy.

One of the original design goals of the Internet was to ensure that its packets could "ride on top" of the existing telephone network. This meant that millions of users could join Internet services for \$10 a month or less and experience no increase in their home telephone bills. Americans increasingly rely on affordable Internet access to communicate as part of a community, to transact business and to continue their education.

As consumers of broadband services, Americans expect the right to use the applications they need at the necessary speeds. As facilitators of learning, the higher education community increasingly relies on the public Internet to reach students living off-campus, many of whom have only one choice for broadband service. When broadband providers succumb to the temptation to block Internet packets at the network layer in order to avoid competition at the application layer, this subverts the open, modularized structure of the Internet and undermines both the ability of Americans to communicate with one another and the ability of the educational community to perform its mission.

Need for a Long-Term Solution

EDUCAUSE applauds the recent actions by the FCC’s Enforcement Bureau to fine those broadband providers responsible for blocking VoIP traffic. However, the expiration of the Madison River Communications, LLC consent degree after thirty months clearly demonstrates that a legislative remedy is required, and soon.

In the interim, while Congress works on rewriting the Telecommunications Act, we encourage the Commission to issue a ruling that prevents Internet packet discrimination by communication transport service providers. Such a ruling would be consistent with the Commission’s mandate to protect American’s right to access information and would preserve the spirit of openness so vital to the Internet.

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