

Insider Q&A: Girding for net neutrality fight

March 20 2017, by Tali Arbel



This undated photo provided by Vimeo shows Michael Cheah. Vimeo, a New York-based video sharing site that is part of billionaire media mogul Barry Diller's IAC/InterActiveCorp, is one of the most vocal proponents of net neutrality. Cheah, Vimeo's general counsel, spoke with The Associated Press about what the company sees coming under the new Trump administration.

(Vimeo via AP)

Some tech companies are gearing up for a fight over Obama-era rules that prohibit broadband providers from treating some web services—ahem, their own—better than rival services.

These rules made the Federal Communications Commission a tough overseer of telecom.

But the new FCC chairman, appointed by President Donald Trump, is a fierce critic of these rules, which are known as net neutrality. The regulation bars [broadband providers](#) from blocking or slowing down websites and from charging internet companies like Netflix or Hulu for faster access to customers, a practice known as "paid prioritization." It also confers broader powers upon the FCC to investigate companies' practices.

It's widely expected that Congress or the FCC will undo or weaken these rules, though no formal plan is on the table yet.

Vimeo, a New York-based video sharing site that is part of billionaire media mogul Barry Diller's IAC/InterActiveCorp, is one of the most vocal proponents of net neutrality. Vimeo's general counsel, Michael Cheah, spoke with The Associated Press recently about what the company sees coming. Questions and answers have been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Why are you defending rules before anyone has made a move against them?

A: We wanted to show our support. If and when it does become a point

under challenge, we will help organize.

Q: What response do you expect from the tech community?

A: When people have something to lose, you get more people on board. You have a greater incentive for people to dig in and fight this. From private conversations I've had, there are companies big and small that do care about this. They are waiting to act.

Q: Net neutrality got a lot of public support in 2014. Do you expect similar support when immigration, health care and other issues are already making headlines?

A: Is this a top-tier issue? Absolutely. It's how you get information. This time around it'll be just as important, if not more.

Q: What do you think of legislation that enshrines [net neutrality](#)'s principles but takes away the broader policing powers the rules gave the FCC? Republican lawmakers proposed that back in 2015.

A: You leave open too many ways for the carriers to do other things. There's too many levers they have the ability to pull.

Q: Like what?

A: Zero rating is a good example of that.

Q: That's when, for example, AT&T exempts its own video service, DirecTV Now, from phone data caps but charges other video companies for the same favor. How does that hurt you?

A: We have concerns about (broadband providers) zero-rating their affiliated data. We also have problems with people who see zero rating

as a profit center, try to charge for it. There's not much difference between that and paid prioritization.

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