

When boys play with toys....

Dean Collins

Andrew Cuomo is a politician most Australians won't have heard of but today he is trying to radically change the internet that you connect to every day.

As the attorney general of New York State the recent collusion enacted between his office and the three largest ISP's in the USA (Verizon, Time Warner, Sprint) will affect you personally sooner rather than later.

This along with the recent efforts of Australian Federal Senator Stephen Conroy, demonstrates the dangers of what can happen when boys play with dangerous toys that they don't understand the ramifications of.

"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." William Shakespeare

To get an understanding of why this is happening and how it should be driving hoards of protestors onto the street (but isn't and how it's happening under your noses without most web users even being aware of it happening) it would help to get an understanding of "The Players" in this performance and an understanding of what is motivating their actions;

The Politician:

A rose by any other name – The Politicians role is simply to be re-elected. Anything else you see them doing is simply an effort to raise their profile and be "seen to doing something,.. or rather anything" in order to be re-elected.

The Lobbyist

The Machiavellian of our performance – working for the highest bidder, this unseen mandarin has a cunning way of pulling the strings in the background, with a simple whisper into the ear of a politician "think of the children" they are able to bide their masters bidding. Motivations of "The Lobbyist" are simple: A house in The Hamptons (or Byron Bay for the Australian version)

The ISP

With their world being dragged from the modest 14.4k Hayes Modem to the DSL/WiMax/Fiber Optic permanently connected "always on demand" high speed internet we now find ourselves in, the ISP's lot is a thankless task.

Their biggest burden being a tossup between the hapless luddite who calls help desk 3 times a month with their latest issue or the P2P downloading teenager burning up bandwidth by downloading the latest & hottest content that they just must have to fill their brand new 1TB hard drives. Dropping newsgroup servers will save them at least 1.5TB of disk space for each and every day (with a 30 day retention rate this can add up to quite a large amount of content they no longer need to store).

The Carrier

(motivations are different to the ISP even if they are often part of the same parent company)

The carrier once upon a time was king. Before "The Carter Act" you couldn't even connect a ptn telephone to the network that you didn't buy from them.

Each and every month the latest 'ransom' bill from the carrier would arrive and you paid and paid and paid because there was no other choice.

Now with voip, the carrier is chasing smaller and smaller telephone bills each month (here in the USA \$19.99 a month gets you unlimited calls to all landlines and cell phones nationally). Now with Skype using P2P networking, these figures are taking an even bigger hit. Carriers thought television was the answer, sure everyone was paying less for their phone bills but television that's where the real money was at.... now with Netflix on demand and Joost, people are once again using the carriers networks as dumb pipes paying the lowest common fee possible for connectivity.

So what exactly was the collusion that happened last week, and why did the internet change overnight without you even noticing it.

I couldn't explain it any better than Cuomo himself so here is his quote

"NEW YORK, NY (June 10, 2008) – Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo today announced landmark agreements with Verizon, Time Warner Cable, and Sprint to shut down major sources of online child pornography. For the first time, three of the world's largest Internet Service Providers ("ISPs") have agreed to block access to child porn from two significant sources"
http://www.oag.state.ny.us/press/2008/june/june10a_08.html

Seems pretty reasonable right – child porn bad...must prevent ("*think of the children*" being whispered into the ears of politicians far and wide) Sounds like something similar that we have been hearing from Australian politicians...."must spend your taxes on the 'great Firewall of Australia'.....*think of the children*" didn't a press release like that come out of Senator Conroy's office recently?

Even though countless technical people have clearly stated that the Great Firewall of Australia wont work and have clearly demonstrated how your average 13 year old can bypass a proxy, and that the millions of dollars spent to block 'bad' sites using your tax dollars were just wasted before they even finished being spent.

But lets face it educated discourse like that doesn't make anything but the geek press, the mainstream press report "Ooo Ahhh vote for Labour....they 'care' about the children".

Here is where the USA and Australian 'endeavors' differ. The USA schemes are far more nefarious, (I think it has something to do with the cost of real estate in The Hamptons being more expensive than Byron Bay and the better class of lobbyist in the USA).

For the skeptics (and the tin foil hat brigade) go and watch this video first
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JP_3WnJ42kw

So last Thursday Verizon made the following announcement that they were dropping over 1000+ newsgroup hierarchies. They would however continue to carry managed "big8" newsgroup hierarchies.

Yep you heard that correct they were killing off 99.7% of all newsgroups and would no longer be providing access to them.

So you might think 99.7% of these newsgroups were carrying child porn, bomb making information and terrorist plans to rule the world, nope. (see below)

"Cuomo claimed that his office found child porn on 88 newsgroups--out of roughly 100,000 plus newsgroups that exist. In his [press release](#), he took credit for the companies' blunderbuss-style newsgroup removal by saying: "We are attacking this problem by working with Internet service providers...I commend the companies that have stepped up today to embrace a new standard of responsibility, which should serve as a model for the entire industry."

Ok so I cant exactly work out what Cuomo is gloating about most, that he found 88 newsgroups, so approximately less than 1 newsgroup in every 1500 had some child porn image (quick someone upload some porn NY AG's website so we can have his website taken off the Internet for good as well) please read this again – not 1 in every 1500 posts!! it was 1 unproven picture in every 1,500 newsgroups. The evidence collected was not provided (e.g. was the picture in question young just “possibly sub 18 years old” or really bad kiddy porn) Remember this was a news conference NOT a court case.

Eg if a newsgroup has 500 posts a day (not uncommon for groups like [microsoft.public.word](#)) and the New York Attorney generals office reviewed 30 days worth of images they found 1 possible child porn image per 17 million newsgroup posts.

Wow – way to go Cuomo. Gee you really earned your pay check this month.

Ok so this doesn't really affect you right?

Lets face it no-one uses newsgroups apart from computer geeks and perverts right – I mean groups like [symantec.customerservice.general](#), [us.military](#), [microsoft.public.excel](#), are breeding grounds for underpants wearing, late night reading, child perverts).

So lets put this into a perspective that the average reader will understand.

Andrew Cuomo found 88 bad images and killed 992 out of 1000+ Usenet hierarchies in collusion with the 3 largest ISP's in the USA.

Ok so put another way, lets say you went into work on Monday morning, and out of the 1000 websites you had saved into your favorites folders only 8 out of 1000 were deemed Cuomo friendly. All the other 992 of them were wiped off the internet never to be seen again.

Would this affect you?

This cataclysmic death to a major portion of internet content has occurred, not through rule of law, not due to the highest court in the land handing down it's decree but simply through 'editorial decision'.

The New York Attorney General and 3 guys sat down in a room and thought this would be a good idea.

And like a velvet encased sledgehammer let rip on the internet in one foul swoop, not really understanding all of the ramifications but like little boys not thinking they cried in unison “think of the children” and it was done.

Or was it?

The question not being covered by the press is why is this happening?

The rest of this article is speculative and I'll probably be sued for libel but here goes.

What's in it for “The Players” – why did The Politician sit down with The Carriers and markedly change the internet as you know today almost overnight with no real public discussion or dialog?

Andrew Cuomo – gets press, and to be seen to be doing something, (probably being advised by lobbyist who have 'ulterior motives' and he's too stupid to know the difference).

The guy would hardly know a nntp server from a content cache but here he is blindly wielding the power to make it happen.

I means lets face it, when your predecessor was "Client #9" it's hard to be taken seriously by anyone.

So if The Politician doesn't have anything to really gain then lets look at one of the other Players.

Verizon are leading the pack so lets pick on them – What's in it for them?

Heaps of reasons; far too many to detail, and all speculative - but here's my interpretation.

Usenet is an ancient 'spooky' space on the internet that no one but geeks and porn swapping perverts visit, by blocking 99.7% of UseNet's under the guise of getting rid of kiddy porn Verizon are able to establish a precedent that 'managing' internet access for the betterment of society is a good thing.

The thin edge of the wedge has been struck.

By setting a precedent that 'management by editorial decision' is allowed The Carriers have finally killed the albatross around their neck called "Net Neutrality".

This pesky issue of Net Neutrality has been preventing The Carriers from making the "real money" they 'deserve'.

For years they've been trying to go to Google and say – Hey Larry and Sergey, you guys made \$20b from people visiting your search website on 'our' networks – pay us some protection money or a few packets might get lost along the way.

Larry and Sergey says back – "*no way man, net neutrality means a level playing field for all*".

Or does it anymore?

According to the ISPs: "We're limiting our own Usenet groups, not blocking others".

http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-9967004-38.html

So according to Cuomo's office, it's ok for ISP's to disconnect 99.7% of Usenet groups from customers without any explanation BUT that if you want to pay \$15 to one of the other Usenet providers overseas it's all cool to go and look at child porn on their servers that's a-ok.

I can read the headlines tomorrow "*New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo says that looking at child porn is a-ok with him as long as you pay for it*"

I cant work out what is more laughable that he's strong arming ISP's to drop Usenet and he thinks this is a good thing OR that he feels he's gotten enough press so going after the hard work of actually blocking child porn is a waste of his efforts and too hard.

When exactly is this guy up for re-election again???

So in affect Net Neutrality has been struck down in the name of "fighting kiddy porn".

After that it's easy to start blocking off entire country domains, I mean no one in the USA has any good reason for reading Arabic blogs in Iran correct?

Ok now lets move to something that some people will care about, but with 2 sets of prior acts Verizon will be covered.

Lets start to block all P2P traffic, I mean P2P is only used by people swapping pirated music and video's – yes some 5% of the population may complain but most of them will be kids and not voters so we should be able to contain any publicity backlash.

I mean yes Comcast tried earlier this year to 'delay' P2P packets but they made the mistake of not 'cloaking' their moves under the guise of fighting kiddy porn. Should have gone with "Fighting Terrorism" guys, you can get anything passed using that as your motive.

....now lets move onto the juicy bits. – That pesky Vonage Voip traffic is travelling over our users networks and Verizon don't make any money from this, lets start blocking that traffic.

....You like watching video's from Netflix using their Roku internet set-top box, cool we'll just have to charge you for this.

....Listening to a radio station that isn't in the Time Warner 'family', sorry this is tier 2 internet class traffic so the audio might be a little jittery from time to time, sorry about that.....

If you want to hear from people who are far better at explaining this I'll ask you yet again to check out <http://deancollinsblog.blogspot.com/2008/03/net-neutrality.html>

Like I said, it all started with some dumb politician who had probably never used Newsgroups before and had some carrier stooge whisper into his ear about 'think of the children'.....the rest is history.

As a society we should be strong enough to accept that any technological solution to a societal problem will never work and any politicians who suggest otherwise are either too dumb to be making that decision (e.g. swallowed a story from a lobbyist) or is acting in coercion.

But what do I know; I'm just a disgruntled geek.

Cheers,
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