

AT & T Opens Can of Worms with Blocking of 4Chan

Editor's Note: We need to have an open political forum to discuss all of these issues. Who owns the access? Who is allowed to show the content? We need to be aware of these issues now, or our options will be gone before we even have a chance to consider them.

(newsfactor.com [1]) - AT&T revived the issue of network neutrality over the weekend by blocking the 4Chan message board. On Sunday, 4Chan founder Christopher Poole posted a notice that AT&T was "filtering/blocking img.4chan.org" for AT&T customers.

AT&T confirmed the blocking, but said it was because of a denial-of-service attack on 4Chan that began on Friday. It said access was blocked temporarily to prevent the attack from impacting its other customers, and "was in no way related to the content at img.4chan.org."

Poor Response, Not Censorship

It added, "Overnight Sunday, after we determined the denial-of-service threat no longer existed, AT&T removed the block on the IP addresses in question. We will continue to monitor for denial-of-service activity and any malicious traffic to protect our customers." DDoS attacks brought down the 4Chan site twice in June.

Poole appeared to confirm AT&T's statement in a blog posting. "This wasn't a sinister act of censorship, but rather a bit of a mistake and a poorly executed, disproportionate response on AT&T's part," he wrote. "Whoever pulled the trigger on blackholing the site probably didn't anticipate (nor intend) the consequences of doing so."

While the block was in effect, some 4Chan members moved to retaliate, reportedly posting the phone number and e-mail address of AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson. A report that Stephenson had died appeared on CNN's user-generated iReport Web site but was quickly removed.

Reactions across the Web indicated a fear of 4Chan's users. "AT&T has just opened perhaps the most vindictive, messy can of worms it could have possibly found," said TechCrunch. "Blocking any site is an extreme breach of user trust, but the decision to block 4chan in particular just seems stupid. Expect the Web equivalent of rioting if this doesn't change soon."

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Amid the fuss, the DDoS attack on 4Chan continued, slowing the site and bouncing back millions of messages to AT&T's servers.

FCC Likely To Weigh In

Whatever the case, AT&T's blocking presents an appearance of censorship and likely will catch the eye of new FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, who favors network neutrality. The Federal Trade Commission is also rumored ready to enforce neutrality rules for Internet service providers.

AT&T reportedly submitted comments to the FCC arguing against network neutrality. The company wants the FCC to rule on individual cases instead of adopting a broad rule.

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<http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2009/07/t-opens-can-worms-blocking-4chan>

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[1] <http://www.newsfactor.com/>