



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Throttling Customers' Traffic
in Order to Send Advertisements to Customers**

Inside the Internet Cloud¹ Throttling Customers' Traffic in Order to Send Advertisements to Customers

September 21, 2014

Last week, I experienced once again an episode in which my Internet Service Provider (ISP) denied me using the Internet while this ISP placed advertising messages onto my computer. In a nutshell, AOL's cloud edged out my personal cloud by monopolizing the Internet's finite bandwidth. (I use the words *Internet bandwidth* to describe the Internet's capacity to send and receive user traffic.)

This situation should be considered intolerable to Internet users. AOL held-up the sending of an email *on the session I was paying AOL to support* while AOL used it to send advertisements. I was put on hold, while at the same time, AOL was downloading ads and placing them on my screen.

Experiencing the encroachment of advertising messages on the use of the Internet is a harbinger of our future limitations. This event is an example of why this writer is increasingly leaning toward Uncle Sam declaring the Internet to be a public utility, regulating it as such, or keeping it as it is. This represents a shift in my stand. I continue to favor assessing fees for the amount of bandwidth usage and quality of service provided. But then, I am rethinking this stand as well. I ask you to read about these issues and I ask for your participation. In these essays, we can jointly work through the issues and then declare our stand to the FCC.

A Disturbing throttle

Returning to the episode I introduced above---and one that I encounter many times each week---I was sending an email to a business associate. The email contained no attachments, videos, sound tracks, or photos. Its contents were as bandwidth-benevolent as could be: a few lines of text.

I pressed the ENTER key to initiate the email delivery, as shown below (Figure 1).²

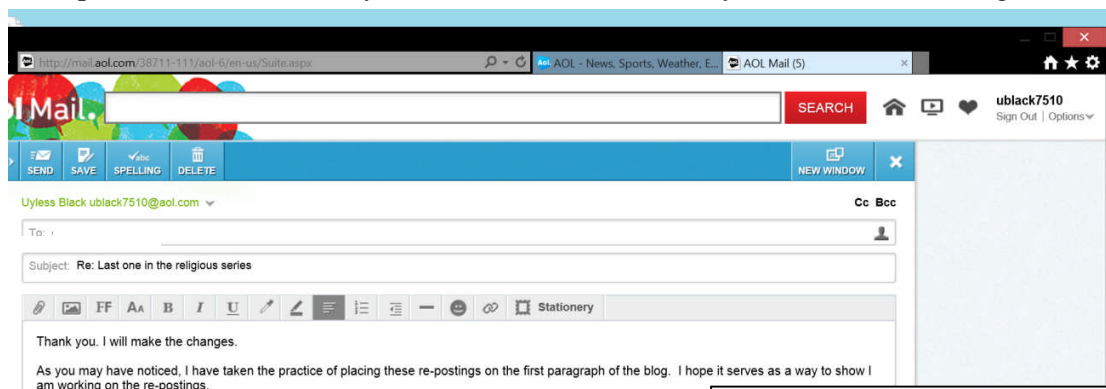


Figure 1. A successful transmission.

It went ok, but I noticed a delay; an indication that congestion was likely occurring on my local loop, at AOL's servers, or in the Internet in general. Maybe it was a combination of these factors. Whatever the case might have been, I keyed another email and pressed the ENTER key.

¹ "Throttling," picture in thought cloud on cover, courtesy of Google, September 21, 2014.

² Certain parts are blanked-out for privacy purposes.

AOL went into a hold mode, which equates to placing an envelope into a post office mail box, closing the lid, and not hearing the envelope drop into the box. What had happened? I waited a few seconds, a few more, then even more. Not overly concerned, I assumed the Internet was busy. Many customers were lined-up at the Internet windows, waiting to make their deposits and withdrawals.

However, while waiting for AOL to inform me that my email had been successfully delivered, the screen shown in Figure 2 appeared on my screen. I circle in red, two parts of this screen that are relevant to the issue of this article.

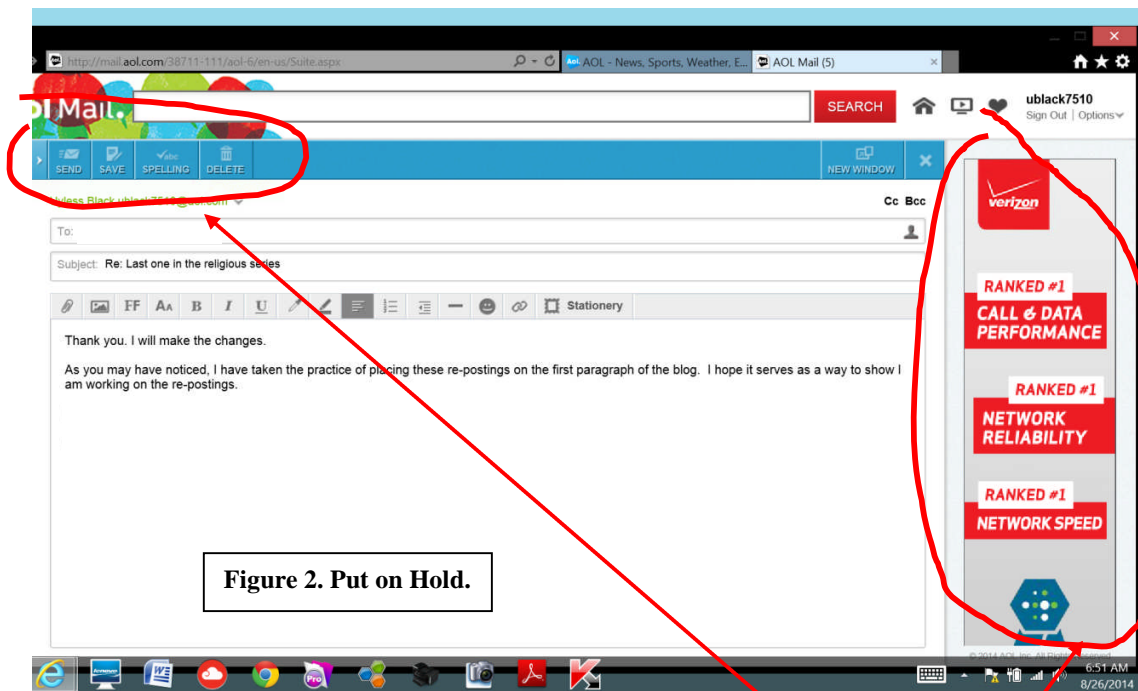


Figure 2. Put on Hold.

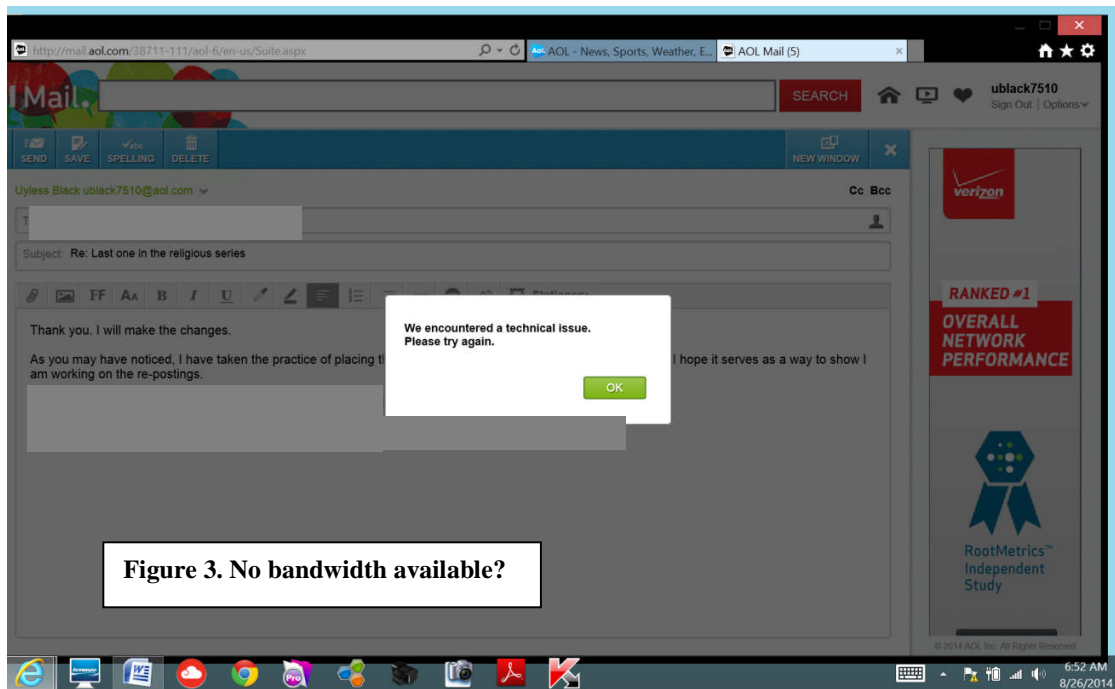
Take a look at the now shaded area as shown with this arrow. As seen in Figure 1, it was originally non-shaded. By shading this part of the screen, AOL was informing me I was on hold. During this lapse, this image appeared on my screen. During this lapse, I could not alter the screen and release the freeze unless I pressed the delete icon. If I did, AOL would send a message asking if I indeed wanted to end the transmission; that is, to end the freeze.

During the denial of bandwidth for my email, AOL was using the bandwidth on my local loop to tell me Verizon was “RANKED #1” in “NETWORK SPEED.”

Perhaps I should have been using a Verizon wireless service instead of Frontier’s local loop telephone lines. But maybe my throttle came from AOL because AOL was denied bandwidth from the company that ultimately controls the bandwidth---the capacity---of the local loop. In this case, the Frontier telephone company.

Ordinary users of the Internet do not know about these arcane machinations. Nor should they be tasked to know. They should have an assurance that the evolving and soon to be pervasive mail service of the Internet will provide the safety, security, privacy, and *fairness* of the devolving and semi-defunct US Post Office.

While I was waiting (for some minutes) for my email to be sent, the image in Figure 3 image appeared.



The error message may have come from AOL’s natural and acceptable handling of its network load of traffic. But what is disconcerting about this event is receiving the advertisements shown here, while my email encountered a “technical issue” and awaited the services of...who knows? Fountier Telephone at the local loop? AOL using the local loop? In the meantime, the advertisements stayed on the screen.

It is reasonable to assume that if AOL had not sent be the Verizon advertisement, my email could have used the bandwidth taken up by the advertisement.³

For this disussion, it is only relevant that AOL throttled my traffic, but did not throttle its advertisement to me. The less we citizens raise our ire about these subtle but growing intrusions into Net Neutrality, the more the Internet vendors will intrude into our Internet sessions.

As I cautioned a few months ago, I find more advertisements being placed on my screen that I cannot easily click-off or cannot click-off at all. In disgust, I usually terminate my Internet seesion and logon again. This growing nusiance is only the beginning of the Interent losing its neutrality.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, I am changing my stand about Net Neutrality. I am growing increasingly uneasy with the idea of the FCC relinquishing more of its already tenuous control over the Internet. But then, I also fear FCC’s heavy regulatory hand.

More later, from Your on the Street Reporter.

³ Yes, cookies and other pre-stored data on my machines may have enabled the display of the Verizon ad with minimal effect on my session. Nonetheless, this example of the commercialization of the Internet is a growing issue for users.