Does the Internet Care Where You Live or Work?

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Question

Does the internet care where you live or work?

Answer

I hope not. But when it comes to testing your internet connection, it does matter. The old saying "it's all about location, location, location" definitely applies when you're trying to diagnose a network connection that is going down and slowing down.

If you think of internet like the national highway system, there are a lot of ways between any two points on the map. Some fast, some incredibly slow - and some of them are sure to get you lost. The same thing applies to information "packets" that traverse the internet. Determining if you can get from point 'a' to point 'b' depends a lot on the path you take. Choose the wrong path and your data could get lost, get on a path full of traffic congestion and your data will slow to a crawl.

To test your network you need to focus on where you are starting from (your computer), where you are going (a website, streaming site, game server, etc.), and whether the route you are testing is the same as the route you intend to go down. Oddly there are a number of web based tools that test your connection without paying attention to the map your internet provider makes you follow.

When you run a speed test, you are testing the speed from your computer to one of many servers. But wait, you don't get your e-mails from that server. So how is that test valid? Well, in some ways it isn't. It can tell you how fast your connection is to a point on the internet. What it can't tell you is how fast your connection is to the point on the internet you want to reach. Some ping tests do the same thing. They test from you to their server.

Location matters. To accurately test the time it takes for you to get to work, you don't drive to the ice cream shop and say "yeah it would be about that fast." Taking a different route gets different results. When testing your network make sure you use a tool that tests the exact route from your computer to where you want to go. You can get ice cream after the test.

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