

## Comcast Considering 250GB Cap, Overage Fees *Insider* provides details of new 'protocol agnostic' solution

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A **Comcast insider** tells me the company is considering implementing very clear monthly caps, and may begin charging overage fees for customers who cross them. While still in the early stages of development, the plan -- as it stands now -- would work like this: all users get a 250GB per month cap. Users would get one free "slip up" in a twelve month period, after which users would pay a **\$15 charge**

**for each 10 GB over the cap they travel.** According to the source, the plan has "a lot of momentum behind it," and initial testing is slated to begin in a month or two.

"The intent appears to be to go after the people who consistently download far more than the typical user without hurting those who may have a really big month infrequently," says an insider familiar with the project, who prefers to remain anonymous. "As far as I am aware, uploads are not affected, at least not initially." According to this source, the new system should only impact some 14,000 customers out of

Comcast's 14.1 million users (i.e. the top 0.1%).



As a few of you may have noticed, Comcast received a public relations beating and is being investigated by the FCC for their use of Sandvine gear to throttle upstream P2P traffic. This practice of using forged TCP packets to "break" BitTorrent connections was discovered first in our [forums](#) in May of last year, some five months before the Associated Press story made national headlines.

Comcast **also** boots high consumption users from their network for crossing an invisible consumption threshold. Based on user testimony, this limit has varied from 100-600GB per month, depending on regional congestion. Customers who cross the limit are sent this [disconnection letter](#), which fails to tell the user how much consumption is too much.

When pressed, Comcast refuses to clarify.

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This new plan would seemingly change all that. The process is being built from the ground up around the idea of transparency as an effort to get the FCC off of Comcast's back. But the new system will also be part of a broader, industry-wide anti-piracy movement, part of which I discussed [earlier today](#).

The new cap will be coupled with plans to increase enforcement of DMCA letters sent to P2P pirates. "Up until now, letters sent out to account holders have not been tracked," the source says. "This will change, with progressively increasing penalties, up to **disconnection of the account after four letters within a 12 month period.**" This will be one way Comcast can maintain their promise to be "protocol agnostic," while still booting some high-consumption users.

There's no word yet on whether Comcast will provide customers with a bandwidth-usage tracking system, but it seems likely, says the source. "I know that the customer service folks absolutely do not want people continually calling in to check on their status," they say. "Nor do we want to get into arguments over whose bandwidth monitoring is accurate" they say, referring to users utilizing their own bandwidth measurement tools.

The source isn't certain whether this new cap and overage structure will be accompanied by throttling. Reading between the lines of their new deal with the Distributed Computing Industry Association, it seems likely that they'll ultimately be throttling just illegal P2P traffic, once network hardware evolves.

Keep in mind that this project remains in its **preliminary stage** and the numbers could easily change. As Comcast has [previously noted](#), they won't officially announce the new system until the end of this year. Comcast has yet to respond to several requests for comment, though I'll be happy to publish their confirmation or denial of the project specifics. I'm currently in the process of digging for additional information.

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-Comcast insider

"Personally, I think this is a step in the right direction and something that will benefit our customers," says my source. I've been writing about this issue for the better part of the [last decade](#). I'm guessing many users will think a 250GB per month cap is too low and the \$15 per 10GB overage fee is too high, but at least the new limits, if applied, are honest.

**Update:** I spoke briefly with Comcast spokesman Charlie Douglas, who has this to say about the 250GB cap: "Comcast is currently evaluating this service and pricing model to ensure we deliver a great online experience to our customers. We have not made any changes to our current service offerings and have no new announcement to make at this time."

**Update 2:** Looking at the user comments, I feel like the conversation shouldn't be so much about whether 250GB a month is reasonable (it is), but whether it makes sense to open the door to **overage charges**. Comcast would be the first major U.S. ISP to charge overage fees, and once that door is open, there's nothing to stop the caps from constantly getting lower and the per-GB fees from perpetually getting higher in an uncompetitive and poorly regulated market.

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