



III. BROADBAND USE IN MICHIGAN

Connect Michigan's mapping and research have provided data-driven analyses of the challenges and opportunities to enhance statewide broadband deployment and adoption. As access and adoption rates increased over the last five years, so too did the innovative ways that Michiganders are using technology. For example:

- Schools throughout Michigan have recognized the growing need for technological development. Schools in Emmet, Charlevoix, Gladwin, and Clare Counties have recently added new devices for student and faculty use. Nearly one-quarter of Michigan parents of school-age children (23%) state that their children's school provides students with a laptop or tablet computer, and nearly one-half of those parents (47%) report that receiving a computer from the school had a positive impact on their child's grades.
- Nearly one-half of working-age Michigan adults (44%) rely on the Internet to seek or apply for jobs, while nearly one-quarter (22%) go online to further their education by taking online classes.

As a growing number of residents go online, Michigan businesses will increasingly need to rely on high-quality and reliable Internet connections to remain competitive. Broadband and technology can provide these organizations new opportunities to sustain, succeed, and grow through increased revenues, decreased costs, improved communications, enhanced efficiency, and expansion into new markets.

In this day and age, high-speed Internet is absolutely critical. It is no longer a luxury, and it is essential for any kind of business growth . . . No one can grow a business and no one will locate a business that depends on high-speed Internet access to an area without this vital utility. Working with organizations that can help us build that critical mass is essential to our economic development strategy.

*-Andy Hayes, President
Northern Lakes Economic Alliance*

Small businesses in particular are key to economic growth in Michigan. Statewide, 86% of all businesses have fewer than 20 employees and these small and microbusinesses account for 1/3 of all jobs in Michigan. These organizations maintain a vital role in fostering vibrant communities and promoting healthy local economies through new entrepreneurial opportunities and billions of dollars in annual revenues to the state.

There are countless examples statewide of small and microbusinesses utilizing broadband to promote and grow their organizations.⁵

⁵ <http://youtu.be/ErUwnG00soA?list=PL6B968727852C168C>.

Getz's Clothiers in Marquette, Michigan, has used high-speed broadband and e-commerce opportunities to sell its work and active lifestyle apparel and to expand sales from locally-derived, in-store revenues to a national online presence. High-speed broadband has enabled Getz's to ship 300-400% more orders than they were capable of 4-5 years ago, as well as employ 50 individuals (25 full-time and 25 part-time). Utilizing the Internet to expand its business has also made it significantly easier to communicate with customers – the company uses an online live help system in which customers can chat with the company via the website. This system has reduced phone call volume significantly, yet made the company more accessible overall.

Michigan Farm Market in Ellsworth, Michigan, began as an online business out of a garage. The organization was able to raise money via an online crowdfunding campaign to expand into a retail storefront. Michigan Farm Market continues to use technology to automate processes, grow its business, and ship Michigan-made products from nearly 100 local food producers, crafters, artists, and artisans to customers across the globe.

Klever Innovations in Grand Haven, Michigan, is an Internet-driven supplier of safe box cutters. The company has used broadband and an active web presence to differentiate itself from many other competitors within the market, offering instructional and safety videos as well as photos of each product online. By using the Internet, the company has been able to retain local jobs while creating a brand recognized on a global scale.

For **Regency Court Reporting** in Commerce Township, broadband technology has created growth and expansion opportunities, while still reducing costs and enhancing efficiency. By switching to Internet-based software and cloud services, the company eliminated storage expenses previously required for CDs and other media, as well as equipment costs. Further, videoconferencing has enabled Regency Court Reporting to become active nationally and internationally without the burden of travel expenses.

With a goal of expanding Michigan's economic development and creating new jobs, Connect Michigan has worked with local governments and commercial development groups to facilitate workshops for small businesses on how to best use technology.

Diane Long, executive director at [Project Starburst](#), a food pantry in Big Rapids, took advantage of one such workshop conducted by Connect Michigan, the Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce (MCACC), MichiganWorks!, and other local groups. The workshop discussed marketing for businesses through social sites, review boards, and email. After attending, Long and Project Starburst changed their online interactions with local residents by using Facebook, editing their website, and changing email providers to enable clear and accessible communications.

Thanks to these changes, program needs, closings due to weather, information on other programs, ways to donate, and more are all being conveyed to larger audiences and client numbers have increased.

Small Business Technology Taskforce

In 2013, Connect Michigan, in partnership with the Michigan Rural Council and the Microenterprise Network of Michigan launched the Small Business Technology Taskforce (SBTT) project to encourage the adoption and use of broadband and related technology among rural small businesses in Michigan.

Four pilot communities were selected for the SBTT project including Barry County, Clare County, St. Clair County, and the Village of Port Sanilac. Each community received a full-day of tailored training, with a goal of creating a sustainable taskforce of local volunteers dedicated to providing ongoing, one-on-one support to entrepreneurs and business owners. The project also offered a [Broadband Taskforce Development Toolkit](#) with sustainable tools to support and promote broadband adoption and use.

That same year, Connect Michigan also hosted a Technology and Small Business event attended by over 150 individuals and sponsored six attendees to the International Economic Development Council's technology-led economic development training in Ann Arbor. These sponsored attendees included Rachel Smolinski, executive director, Harbor Inc.; Mandi Chasey, director of business services, Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation; Jan Kellogg, economic development specialist, Northern Lakes Economic Alliance; Katherine C. Methner, director of business and economic services, MichiganWorks! Region 7B; Geoffrey Donaldson, senior planner, St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission; and Vicki Schwab, director, Delta County Economic Development Alliance.

The focus of the International Economic Development Council's training was to provide instruction on how to partner with government, industry, higher education, and the private sector to create a highly integrated network of technology and innovation. Sponsored individuals were selected based on their responses to a questionnaire regarding the extent to which they and their organization had embraced technology-

In today's technologically advanced environment, connectivity is increasingly a key ingredient in matching talent to employers' needs. Access to broadband is essential in many cases to identifying talent and making successful labor exchanges.

*-Holly Peoples
Director of Business Services
Michigan Works! The Job Force
Board*

led economic development, what broadband/technology challenges were faced by the communities and businesses they served, and why technology-led economic development was important to these communities. The selected responses provided significant insight on the challenges that Michigan communities have and continue to encounter and the strategies that have been developed to enhance technology infrastructure and encourage broadband adoption buy-in among residents and businesses throughout the state.

With meaningful use of a broadband subscription, Michigan small businesses are able to sell and promote their products and services anywhere in the world, attract and retain talented employees from the global workforce, and access various digital resources to ensure their business is running efficiently. Continuing to encourage Michigan's small and microbusinesses to adopt and use broadband will be vital for Michigan's competitiveness in today's connected global marketplace.

Michigan Broadband Conference

The Connect Michigan Broadband Conference has become the premier technology summit, convening stakeholders and champions from multiple sectors and providing a platform for technology innovators to discuss successes and recommend scalable efforts for other communities.

2013 Connect Michigan Broadband Conference

In October 2013, Connect Michigan held its first, record-breaking Michigan Broadband Conference at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing. The conference was designed to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to share and discover best practices for expanding broadband access, adoption, and use to improve community and economic development in Michigan.

The inaugural conference attracted more than 450 attendees, 300 on the

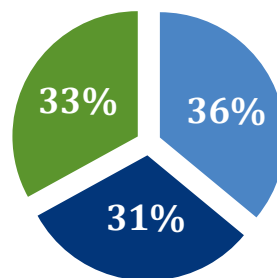


ground and 155 online, from 14 different states. Nearly 200 organizations were represented including libraries, schools, economic development corporations, chambers of commerce, local government, county government, regional planning, national organizations, and technology providers.

The nine keynote speakers represented the state of Michigan, the Aspen Institute, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Connected Nation. The ten panel discussion breakout sessions covered these topics:

- Community enables broadband expansion
- Increasing technology adoption and use among small businesses
- Digital entrepreneurship
- Gigabit libraries
- USDA Rural Utilities Service
- Digital job creation
- Rural broadband expansion successes
- Creating community collaboration for Michigan businesses and libraries
- Technology for rural healthcare
- Understanding the Michigan State Education Network

2013 Conference Attendees



- Local Organizations
- National or State Organizations
- Broadband or Technology Providers

Yet, unlike many other states, the 2013 Michigan Broadband Conference was not funded entirely through the SBI grant program. Instead, Connect Michigan and Connected Nation secured monetary and in-kind sponsorships from 18 different organizations including the Library of Michigan, Internet service providers, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Prima Civitas Foundation, Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Clark Hill PLC.

This was the most unique and useful conference that I have ever attended. We need more opportunities for this type of “cross pollination” of ideas.

-Anonymous post-conference evaluation response

finding answers, and learning new techniques. The interest and sizeable participation in the inaugural event illustrated the need and desire for an impartial broadband and technology advocate to which concerns, questions, and issues can be raised regarding a constantly evolving industry. Positive feedback from attendees indicated that the conference was considered to be a critical asset to building the state's broadband and technology capacity.

2014 Connect Michigan Broadband Conference

Building on the overwhelming success of the 2013 Connect Michigan Broadband Conference, Connect Michigan hosted the 2014 Connect Michigan Broadband Conference on October 29, 2014. The event attendances exceeded 700 participants, with more than 400 onsite in Lansing, Michigan – increasing the previous year's on-site number by more than 100 – and more than 300 unique viewers via livestream technology, nearly doubling the number of last year's plugged-in participants.

Federal, state, and local leaders from education, libraries, economic development, local government, healthcare, and technology sectors assembled to share and learn cross-collaborative best practices for expanding broadband and technology access, adoption, and use and move Michigan to the forefront of the digital economy. Conference sponsors included the Michigan Public Service Commission, Frontier Communications, Comlink, Courtland Consulting, Charter Business, AARP, Clark Hill, Peninsula Fiber

The 2013 Michigan Broadband Conference provided an opportunity for those with broadband issues to network and develop solutions. It offered a neutral venue for raising concerns,

Network, LLC, US Signal, ACD.net, Lynx Network Group, and CenturyLink.

Keynote speakers at the event included Cable Green, Creative Commons, and Alyson Knox, Microsoft. Breakout sessions offered a candid and engaging



discussion with subject-matter experts.

Connect Michigan has also been part of multiple national and state events as a representative of broadband efforts in Michigan. However, it is many of the local meetings hosted as part of the

Connected Community Engagement Program that have resulted in direct and substantial broadband improvements across the state.

