



OUTDOOR WIRELESS NETWORKS: THEIR IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

State and local governments looking to stimulate economic development are increasingly considering outdoor wireless networks. In a **Larstan** survey of state and local managers, 15 percent already have an outdoor wireless solution or plan one within the next two years—not too far behind the 25 percent reporting existing or planned indoor wireless networks, generally a smaller investment. The first adopters of outdoor wireless solutions are experiencing a positive influence on the local economy, ranging from improved quality of life to enhanced government services.

IMPROVING COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life boosts local economies because it helps attract and retain residents and businesses. Some cities provide free or low-cost outdoor wireless access in downtown areas to encourage people to linger during lunch hours and after work—and spend—rather than rushing home to read email or check out entertainment options. For example, the City of Fredericton, in New Brunswick, Canada, built a hotspot spanning 11.5 square miles to reinforce its image as smart and progressive—a place where people want to live, play, learn, and work, and where businesses want to grow. The City offers the service at no charge, using surplus capacity from paying business and government subscribers. For other communities, the primary goal is bridging the “digital divide” by providing free or low-cost Internet access in neighborhoods serving low-income residents.

ENHANCED GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Communities increase their appeal for residential and commercial development when they use outdoor wireless networks to reduce the time it takes to obtain planning, building, utility, land use, and inspection permits and approvals. “A business-friendly climate is critical for attracting and retaining business. Obtaining permits and licenses is one of the most common interactions business have with the government. Mobile permitting solutions enable a community friendlier, faster permitting process,” says Ed Cepulis, senior manager for state and local government industry solutions, Cisco Systems. Using the Digital Communities Land Management Solution, inspectors can use the wireless network from the customer’s site to print approvals, correction notices, permits, and reports—eliminating delays while the inspector drives to the office and administrators re-enter hand-filled forms.

STIMULATING TOURISM

Outdoor wireless solutions also enable cities to provide convenient, location-based services that can stimulate spending by residents and visitors. These services deliver personalized information to the user’s PDA, based on their current location. For example, the city or a service provider might offer a wireless service that suggests dining, shopping, or entertainment options within a specified distance. This could be funded through advertising by participating businesses. Another service might identify and reserve parking spots. Yet another, for tourists, might provide information on local sights. A tourist standing in front of a monument, for example, could hear its history, see a photo of the event it commemorates, and then easily find a nearby restaurant.

BOOSTING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE TO ATTRACT RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES

Whatever reason government uses to justify the initial investment in an outdoor wireless solution, it can capitalize on the investment to also foster educational excellence, an important factor in economic growth. Families consider the excellence of the school system when they move to an area, and businesses are drawn to areas with an educated workforce.

K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities improve their appeal when they enhance classroom curricula with real-time wireless video, bringing the world into the classroom. At California State University at Monterey Bay, for example, students interact with oceanographers in real-time, using wireless voice and video.

GETTING CREATIVE WITH WIRELESS

Outdoor wireless access can stimulate economies in more subtle ways. The Westminster City Council in London is using its Cisco wireless network solution to improve the effectiveness of meter readers by more accurately entering ticket information. They can also attach photos to tickets, which reduces contention of tickets. As a next step, Westminster is considering wireless parking meters, which will send a page to meter readers when the timer has expired. Maximizing revenue from fines is a strategy the City uses to maintain its low tax rates. "The beauty of outdoor wireless solutions is that once the infrastructure is in place, governments and their business partners can continually find creative new ways to boost the economy," says Cepulis.



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