

Broadband growth slows as US acknowledges digital divide

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09/07/2007 13:16:00 - by Leila Makki

ConnectKentucky, a non profit organisation aimed at enabling the US state to achieve 100 per cent broadband connectivity, has helped increase broadband Internet use by 50 per cent.

The organisation has brought access to 518,000 previously un-connected Kentucky homes in the last two years. The state now boasts 93 per cent residential broadband access.



However, Kentucky appears to be bucking the broadband trend. According to a report from the Pew Research Centre, the national US growth rate for broadband service was only 12 per cent last year, down from 40 per cent from the year earlier and the lowest rate in five years.

John Horrigan, associate director for research at Pew, said; "I think we're at a point where many people in the upper socio-economic groups now have broadband"

He added; "You'd expect to see growth continue, but it's going to be in fits and starts. Once you get near 50 per cent of the market, sustaining growth gets more challenging."

According to the Pew study, based on a telephone survey conducted on 2,200 adults during a two-month duration early this year, high-speed Internet service is more widespread in urban areas and among the wealthy in the United States.

The study found that more than half of urban residents and half of suburban residents have high-speed Internet access, in comparison with less than a third of rural residents with broadband access.

Not surprisingly, the Pew study found that minorities are also less likely than Caucasians to have home broadband service. The results show that less than a third of Hispanics and roughly 40 per cent of African-Americans have home broadband service, in comparison to the approximately 50 per cent of Caucasians who said they have high-speed Internet service.

Aside from race, income also plays a vital role in home broadband access. More than 75 per cent of adults with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more reported having high-speed Internet service at home. Whilst only 30 per cent of those surveyed with incomes of less than \$30,000 have access.

The study found that Americans with broadband service use the Internet more that those with slower dial-up service. About two-thirds of broadband subscribers said they use their home broadband on a daily basis, compared with 40 per cent of dial-up service subscribers.

The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is also conducting an inquiry into

broadband providers to see whether cable and telephone companies are doing their part to provide rural and poor Americans with access to high-speed Internet service.

The outcome of the FCC investigation may require regulators to set rate caps or take other initiatives to encourage broadband growth in less affluent areas.

US Representative Rick Boucher, last month outlined a four-step proposal to improve broadband access to areas of the country where people still rely on dial-up service.

Boucher is urging federal lawmakers to adopt similar programs like ConnectKentucky, to promote DSL, cable, fixed wireless, and satellite services to improve broadband service.

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