



## **Rural areas may see better Web access, but not DSL AT&T plans to develop satellite-based network**

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The efforts of a Bowling Green-based nonprofit focused on improving high-speed Internet access and affordability help explain a misunderstanding about one of the provisions of the BellSouth/AT&T merger that relates to Internet subscribers in rural areas.

In northern Warren County, DSL Internet access is not available, but some may think that AT&T was supposed to be working to give rural subscribers low priced DSL within a year of the merger's completion. AT&T spokeswoman Cathy Lewandowski said the company is still working on that and other efforts to expand broadband accessibility in Kentucky.

"By Dec. 31, 2007, AT&T will offer broadband Internet access to 100 percent of the residential living units in the AT&T and legacy BellSouth territory," Lewandowski said. "At least 85 percent of the living units will be offered wireline service and the remainder will be offered service with alternative technologies."

Mark McElroy, senior vice president of operations and communications with public-private technology nonprofit ConnectKentucky, said the merger between BellSouth and AT&T required them to provide affordable broadband to rural areas, but not necessarily DSL.

Since DSL Internet doesn't extend into all the rural service areas, satellite is the option to fill the gap, McElroy said.

"There are physical limitations to DSL. There is only so many feet DSL can extend to their offices. There are going to be households they can't get to - about 15 percent," McElroy said. "Satellite is what makes sense."

AT&T recently announced a satellite-broadband service to rural consumers in Kentucky as an alternative to dial-up.

AT&T Yahoo! Broadband via satellite, provided by WildBlue, will allow customers to select from three service packages, starting as low as \$54.95 a month. Broadband speed options are up to 1.5 megabytes per second to downstream or download information from the Internet to a computer and up to 256 kilobytes per second to upstream, or send information from a computer to the Internet.

Examples of downstreaming include opening a Web page on a computer screen or opening an e-mail message from an inbox. Examples of upstreaming include sending e-mail messages, hosting a Web server and video conferencing.

The satellite-based broadband offering builds on an initial announcement made in May 2006. During the past year, AT&T and WildBlue have worked closely to increase capacity and expand access to more customers, according to Joan Coleman, AT&T state president.

“In remote communities across Kentucky, we have found that consumers are anxious to sign up for broadband and migrate from their current dial-up connection. We have seen a positive demand for a satellite-based broadband Internet service in other states, and our ongoing priority is to deliver on this demand and provide access to high speed Internet as widely as possible, especially in areas where DSL or cable modem service may not be available,” Coleman said earlier this month.

Increasing the state's broadband availability is something ConnectKentucky has been working on since 2004 and has increased the state's broadband coverage from 67 percent to 93 percent, according to McElroy.

“We are on track to reach 100 percent by the end of '07 and the affordability is an important issue for us. We are working to fill the gaps with any type of technology that will fulfill the service, whether it's DSL or satellite,” McElroy said.

It's a community by community effort built by partnerships with various service providers in the state, he said.

McElroy said AT&T's recent announcement is encouraging, but many of the upfront costs with satellite are still prohibitive to more consumers being able to afford to the technology.

For consumers, McElroy pushes the concept of a “relevant” broadband connection, meaning it should be both dependable and affordable.

ConnectKentucky's leadership in broadband adoption sparks federal bill

“The CEO for ConnectKentucky has provided congressional testimony three times in the last four weeks,” McElroy said of pending federal legislation.

ConnectKentucky's implementation of Gov. Ernie Fletcher's Prescription for Innovation has sparked numerous efforts in Congress to establish a national initiative to replicate Kentucky's success, according to McElroy.

In fact, a federal bill that would provide states a grant pool to launch its own versions of ConnectKentucky is before Capitol Hill.

Among several pieces of federal legislation and recommendations by such agencies as the Federal Communications Commission, the bipartisan Connect the Nation Act of 2007 was recently filed by Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., to encourage the rapid deployment of affordable broadband Internet service, particularly in rural areas.

The legislation supports a grant program that would enable states to implement an initiative similar to ConnectKentucky.

- Customers can receive additional service information and can confirm WildBlue availability in their area by calling (800) ATT-2020.

Saturation of broadband: These counties had more broadband usage than dial-up usage. Here's the percentage of residents in these counties who have broadband:

Warren County: 34 percent

Barren County: 41 percent

Hart County: 47 percent

Metcalfe County: 34 percent

Monroe County: 26 percent

Saturation of dial-up: These counties had more dial-up usage than broadband usage. Here's the percentage of residents in these counties who use dial-up:

Edmonson County: 31 percent

Logan County: 33 percent

Todd County: 40 percent

Simpson County: 31 percent

Butler County: 42 percent

Source: 2005 ConnectKentucky Technology Assessment Study

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