



Community Connection

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From digital hub to digital America



By Doug Adams, the Knight Center of Digital Excellence

"I believe that America should lead the world in broadband penetration and Internet access. Full broadband penetration can enrich democratic discourse, enhance competition, provide economic growth, and bring significant consumer benefits."

- President Barack Obama, January, 2008

Our nation's economy is poised for transformation and broadband can be a key component to the nation's innovation and growth. As we work on expanding and improving broadband, we can envision the potential impact on our economy by looking at how new technologies have changed our lives thus far.

The entertainment and consumer electronics industries underwent a transformation when broadband's initial adoption changed the Internet - and the computer - forever.

In 2001, Apple visionary Steve Jobs predicted the computer would evolve to be the "digital hub" of the home - driving applications and electronics that were just emerging. In coming years, the electronics world boomed as iPods and digital cameras flew off the shelves. This happened in conjunction with broadband's initial expansion.

Much as computers and other devices have changed the way we live our lives, broadband and the digital applications it enables have already begun to change the way America does business. Digital platforms continue to gain popularity because they open up new choices for consumers. And with these choices come new opportunities for industries to develop new markets and revenue streams.

Consider the Hollywood writers' strike of 2008. While studio executives initially bemoaned the Internet as an "advertising killer," this labor dispute was based in large part over how to share online revenue.

Just this month, CBS' "March Madness on Demand," an online platform to view NCAA tournament basketball games, is expected to generate over \$30 million during the 10-day tournament. That's 15 to 20 percent more revenue than last year. Online advertising is supplementing, not replacing traditional TV advertising.

So much for the Internet being the death of advertising.

The economic impact of broadband and the Internet doesn't stop there. Consider Facebook, YouTube, eBay, Amazon and countless other online applications that help drive a significant portion of our nation's economy.

What's the next iPod or Amazon? We may never know our full potential if the U.S. fails to make a serious commitment to further increase broadband penetration and speeds.

The fundamental first step is to create the platform for innovation. From there, we can accelerate a process that is already beginning, with initiatives, for example, that enable people to seek medical diagnoses from a doctor through online videoconferencing.

This is why Obama sees broadband as such a vital part of our nation's recovery. His objective is to take Jobs' vision to the next level, so that beyond having digital hubs within our homes, we create a digital America.

Jobs understood that America stood at the precipice of broadband's initial growth. Obama understands it today. Enhanced broadband penetration and speed is key to our nation's ability to innovate and compete in the global economy.

Jobs once said, "A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them."

And that's part of our job at the Knight Center of Digital Excellence. We're here to show people the possibilities - those on the drawing board and those we can't yet imagine.

Doug Adams oversees public information efforts for the Knight Center of Digital Excellence based in Akron, Ohio. To learn more about the Knight Center, go to www.knightcenter.org or e-mail info@knightcenter.org.