

Creating Smarter Amenities

It's common knowledge that the growth of Internet traffic rose dramatically in recent years. However, many are unaware of the incredible rate at which usage has increased. By 2010, the average household will be using 1.1 terabytes (roughly equal to 1,000 copies of the Encyclopedia Britannica) of bandwidth a month, according to an estimate by the Internet Innovation Alliance in Washington, D.C. At that level, 20 homes would generate more traffic than the entire Internet did in 1995.

Residents in manufactured housing communities are no exception to this trend. Ten to 15 years ago, the Internet was viewed as a luxury amenity, a service that allowed one to check weather forecasts and stock prices, usually after waiting through a series of screeches from a dial-up modem and then several additional minutes for the web page to actually load. Overall, Internet access had little impact on the daily lives of its users.

Now, the vast majority of Americans – across all ages, races, and economic classes – is dependant on the Internet in most areas of life. School, work, communication and entertainment would be less convenient, if not impossible, without broadband access. For example, a recent U. K. study suggested that on average, broadband access could enhance a child's school performance by around one full grade level.

Growth in broadband usage in those making between \$20,000 and \$35,000 annually outpaced the national average by more than 15 percent. Adding to that is the fact that former apartment dwellers who grew used to having Internet access in their homes will not settle for life without a stable, fast Internet connection in their new manufactured home. Residents are unlikely to give up this amenity and will most likely be willing to pay to have broadband access as well as other services such as television and telephone. Even though the demand is strong, many manufactured housing professionals are hesitant about network upgrades because of the cost. While the prices have dropped significantly over the past few years, it can still be cost-prohibitive for many communities. However, by partnering with a network optimization company that is separate from the service provider, many communities can actually increase their income.

Companies that follow this model use their capital to update the network and then find providers for services like television, Internet, telephone and more. These providers pay a fee to access the company's infrastructure. Often, deals can be negotiated at a property level to include some or all of the services with rent or dues at deeply discounted rates. Thanks to this additional savings, residents can still enjoy discounted services while adding additional income to the property.

While the decision to upgrade one's network is not one to be made lightly, manufactured housing professionals should not hold off too long. Residents' technological expectations are higher than ever, even in these communities. A lack of access to the services they expect could mean the difference of opting to live in your community, or the folks down the street.



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