



Unlocking Economic Potential and Empowering Remote Work: Broadband in Marquette County

Situation

Marquette County, located halfway between Madison and Stevens Point, is a rural area with a population of 15,000. The county has a high percentage of seasonal homes (27%) and limited infrastructure, including only one stoplight and one Kwik Trip. In 2020, with the shift to online activities due to the pandemic, the Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator anticipated government funding for broadband expansion and began collecting data to understand the county's internet needs.

Response

To address the broadband issues, several key actions were initiated:

- **Data Collection:** In 2020, a survey was conducted on internet speed and reliability. Part-time residents were also asked if they would spend more time in the county if they had better internet access, and 60% responded positively.
- **Follow-Up Survey:** In early 2023, another survey was conducted targeting remote workers and part-time residents. This survey revealed that 13% of respondents were spending 60 or more extra days in the county due to remote work capabilities, and 40% were spending 20 or more extra days.
- **Anecdotal and Tracking Data:** Anecdotal data from realtors and campgrounds indicates increased remote work activity. Cell phone tracking data was used to support these findings.
- **Internet Expansion:** Between 2023-2024, Marquette County expanded internet access to 1,100 more homes, covering 70% of the county. With additional funding from Charter, coverage is expected to exceed 90%.
- **Marketing and Outreach:** Surveys were conducted to understand what attracted part-time residents and remote workers to the area. Common attractions included recreation, beauty, lakes, and peace. This information was used by the Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator to create targeted marketing campaigns through social media and brochures, highlighting the availability of jobs and good internet access.
- **Broadband Survey:** A broadband survey was conducted to understand internet usage in the county. A significant finding was that a third of respondents used the internet for remote work, validating the need for improved broadband infrastructure.
- **Interactive Job Map:** An interactive map was developed showing job opportunities both within and outside the county, linking searchers directly to employers' websites. This tool was designed to help overcome objections related to job availability for trailing spouses.

Outcomes

The efforts led to several positive outcomes:

- **Increased Residency:** The surveys and data collection highlighted the potential for increased residency and longer stays by remote workers and part-time residents.

- **Economic Opportunities:** Improved internet access facilitated remote work, attracting younger residents and not just retirees.
- **Community Engagement:** The surveys provided valuable insights into the needs and preferences of part-time residents and remote workers.
- **Effective Marketing:** High engagement rates on social media posts and successful tourism campaigns helped promote the county as a desirable place to live and work.
- **Job Accessibility:** The interactive job map provides a clear view of job opportunities, making it easier for trailing spouses to find employment.

Lessons Learned

Several key lessons emerged from this initiative:

- **Importance of Data:** Collecting and analyzing data is crucial for understanding the broadband needs and opportunities in Marquette County.
- **Targeted Surveys:** Asking specific questions about remote work and residency provides actionable insights.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Expanding internet access was essential for attracting and retaining residents.
- **Collaboration:** Engaging with realtors, campgrounds, and using tracking data helped validate the findings and guide decision-making.
- **Open Communication:** Providing opportunities for open comments in surveys yielded valuable feedback and insights.
- **Marketing Strategy:** Understanding the attractions and preferences of residents helped tailor effective marketing campaigns.

This case study highlights the importance of detailed assessments, effective marketing, and strategic planning in expanding broadband access. The Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator's involvement and the county's structured approach were pivotal in driving these efforts forward, ensuring Marquette County could effectively address its broadband needs.

Learn More

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