

Huron County Business & Industry Sector

Why Is This Important?

Today, a number of factors are forcing businesses to change time-honored models of operation, including global competition, partnering/outsourcing and demand for more personalized services. Each of these trends can save businesses time and money, but they require a sound technological infrastructure. The good news is that while these trends are becoming more prevalent, the costs of technology are falling. Businesses cannot be sheltered from competitors. The reality is that Huron County businesses must adapt to the changing world in which they operate. Businesses have to learn the tools of the networked economy and innovate in order to survive.

The business & industry sector often experiences the most direct benefit of high-speed Internet with increased sales, profit and growth. However, many businesses and industries are utilizing high-speed Internet to simplify processes, increase efficiency and develop new marketing methods. While a company's employees benefit immediately from Broadband implementation, the consumer also ultimately sees lower prices and better quality.

Increased benefits from the implementation of high-speed Internet are not just for large corporations. For smaller businesses, technology creates an even playing field with much larger companies. eCommerce, the buying and selling of goods over the Internet, allows small or even home-based businesses to operate and sell their goods on a national and sometimes international scale. Where small businesses were once limited to only local customers they could attract through local advertising and word of mouth, the Internet now allows them to attract customers across the globe.

Utilizing Broadband and technology, businesses with multiple locations can save money by implementing Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). VoIP allows businesses to call between those locations with little or

Huron County Business & Industry

- Huron County Economic Development, www.hcdc.net
- Ohio Economic Development, www.Ecodevdirectory.com/ohio.htm
- Ohio Chamber Of Commerce, www.OhioChamber.com
- Ohio Department of Development, www.Odod.state.oh.us
- ODOD Office of Policy Research and Strategic Planning, www.Odod.state.oh.us/research

no costs. It allows users to travel anywhere in the world and still make and receive phone calls. Additionally, VoIP allows for collaboration not available when using traditional telephone methods.

Technology has allowed larger businesses to maximize efficiency in order to better serve customers. Email, intranets, paperless operations and automated logistics processes are just a few examples of how the Internet is allowing large companies to work with much greater efficiency and at lower costs. These practices allow those businesses to expand into other markets, grow their companies and even pass the savings on to their customers.

The largest employers by type are:

- Manufacturing with 8,000 employees
- Trade, transportation and utilities with 3,800 employees
- Local government with 2,600 employees

Where Are We Today?

Huron County residents utilize the Internet to conduct business through a variety of methods at a rate slightly lower than the state average. Uses of the Internet by Huron County residents are as follows:

- 80% of residents research products online (77% statewide)
- 68% of residents purchase products online (70% statewide)
- 53% of residents use online banking (55% statewide)
- 43% of residents search for jobs online (50% statewide)
- 14% of residents buy, sell or trade investments online (19% statewide)

Within the business & industry sector, technology and Broadband are viewed as vital to the economy and Huron County's businesses, including the various agricultural related businesses throughout the county.

The county is served by several chamber of commerce organizations, including the Norwalk Chamber of Commerce www.norwalkareachamber.com and the Willard Chamber of Commerce www.willardchamber.com. Among other things, these organizations serve as a civic clearinghouse, a public relations counselor, a legislative representative, an information bureau and a research and promotion

medium. The chamber websites are often the first place tourists, businesses and those seeking residential/business relocation turn to for information about the Huron County.

Broadband is generally available to most businesses in the county, although there are select areas where there is no service. The availability of cost effective broadband is the primary issue for many businesses.

Overall, there is a wide disparity in the sector when it comes to broadband adoption and use of broadband applications. Some small businesses don't subscribe to broadband and use little technology, while other businesses use broadband and broadband applications like VoIP extensively. There are many broadband applications available to businesses in the county, however many business owners are not aware of them.

Business & Industry Sector Assessment Overview			
Category	Current Assessment	Future Vision	Additional Comments
Networked Places	3	5	
Applications & Services	3	5	
Leadership	2	5	

The Huron County eCommunity Leadership Team found that the business & industry sector is just beginning to use technology to its advantage and believes the Internet to be essential to business operations.

- **Networked Places** – In the category of Networked Places, Huron County’s business & industry sector is currently at stage 3 on a 0 to 5 scale. Some businesses use VoIP to save money. Most office employees have always-on connections to the Internet at their desks. Some mobile workers have laptop computers and can access the office network remotely. Affordable videoconferencing facilities are available in the community.
- **Applications & Services** – In the category of technology Applications & Services, the business & industry sector is currently at stage 2 on a 0 to 5 scale. Some businesses have an informational website. Some businesses transmit or receive some orders electronically.
- **Leadership** – In terms of technology Leadership within the business & industry community, Huron County is currently at stage 3 on a 0 to 5 scale. Some businesses permit some employees periodically to telework. Some businesses encourage employees to take work-related classes offline. Employee training on new technology is a priority.

Where Do We Need To Be?

While the Huron County eCommunity Leadership Team found that business and industry's current use of technology is somewhat limited, the team has an aggressive vision for how the sector should be using technology in two years. The team has set goals to move networked places from stage 3 to stage 5, applications and services from stage 3 to stage 5, and leadership from stage 2 to stage 5, all on a 0 - 5 scale. The Leadership Team wants for all businesses in the sector to be aware of the various broadband applications that are currently available, more affordable broadband to be available to all businesses in the county, extended broadband service to all un-served and under served areas of the county. The team's vision includes:

- Most businesses use VoIP to save money. Most computers have video cameras. Some retailers and manufacturers use RFID to track inventory and equipment.
- Some businesses send and receive video mail. Some businesses outsource most of their computing services. Some businesses routinely use multiparty videoconferencing to coordinate operations.
- New Hires are required to have experience using new technology in business applications.

In Huron County, the median commute to work is roughly 20 minutes for 27,600 people. Finding a way to enable telecommuting for 25% of these workers would result in over \$4.5 million in savings on gas alone (50 miles x 20 miles/gal x \$1.75/gal x 240 day/yr x 6,900). On an individual basis, this is over \$650 per year per commuter, plus the environmental impact from reduced emissions and carbon credits.

How Do We Get There?

Project Ideas

- Develop educational symposiums and communications to inform business owner of the various broadband applications that are currently available.
- Leverage any federal and state funds that may become available in order to make broadband more affordable to businesses.
- Secure provider(s) to extend service to all un-served and under served areas of the county.

Other Potential Projects

- Promote Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) among businesses as a way to save money.
- Leverage proximity to large metropolitan neighbors such as Cleveland for teleworking opportunities.

The eCommunity Leaders within the Business and Industry sector include:

Traci Caldwell – Highway Composites

Dan Schloemer - Firelands Electric Cooperative

Denao Ruttino- Advanced Computer Connections

In working toward the advancement of the business sector goals, Connect Ohio recommends that additional participants be brought into the process, which may include technology providers, subject matter experts, community organizations which serve the business community and the resources of agencies and commercial providers of products and services to the business sector.

Dave Davidson, Northeast State Operations Manager for Connect Ohio will continue to work with the business sector leaders to advance selected projects toward their completion. By leveraging Connect Ohio's project management process, its research information, and its partners, projects will be defined, developed, and reviewed to help assure that the local teams are equipped to execute them. Connect Ohio will assist in the identification of funding sources, introducing technical resources, and helping to define the measurable goals that will ensure that the projects are actionable, measurable, and valuable.