



REGION

## Telecom companies offline with broadband stimulus

BY JIM T. RYAN  
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Some of the largest telecommunication companies that have a presence in Central Pennsylvania declined to seek federal stimulus money to expand broadband Internet networks, saying

more government involvement would be too restrictive.

One problem with broadband money in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is open-access provisions requiring telecoms to allow competitors to use their infrastructure, some companies said.

The federal stimulus package made \$7.2 billion available for broadband Internet infrastructure, computer centers and programs to increase Internet and computer use. The National Telecommunications Information Administration and the Rural Utilities Service are approving broadband applications.

Louisiana-based CenturyLink, the product of the merger of Embarq and CenturyTel, abstained from stimulus money in the first round of applications that will award \$4.3 billion early next year. Competition was one reason, said David Bonsick of Harrisburg, CenturyLink's state executive for Pennsyl-

vania and New Jersey.

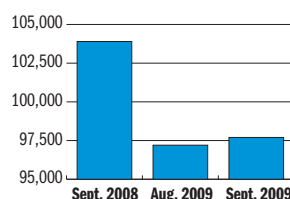
"The open-access provisions are the most distressing," he said. "We want to take advantage of the networks we build, and obviously to do that it's more beneficial to have restricted access."

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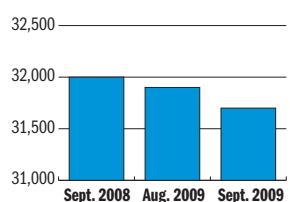
### In brief



INFORMATION JOBS IN PENNSYLVANIA



SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES JOBS IN PENNSYLVANIA



SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY

LANCASTER COUNTY



PHOTO/AMY SPANGLER

Geophysicist Chuck Rhine processes data at Lancaster County-based Enviroscan Inc. Rhine discusses the project — determining a well site for a client — with the firm's president, Felicia Kegel Bechtel.

## WHAT LIES BENEATH?

Lancaster County geophysics firm helps locate everything from storage tanks to buried treasure

BY PAULA HOLZMAN | paulah@journalpub.com

Not every midstate businesswoman can claim her job involves finding "1,400-pound Frisbees."

That's just one of Felicia Kegel Bechtel's stories about Enviroscan Inc., the Lancaster County-based company she began in 1992 with her husband, Tim.

Enviroscan's sole business is geophysics, defined on the firm's Web site as "the science of detecting and mapping

underground, underwater, or otherwise subsurface (i.e. hidden) objects or features."

Among other things, that has meant being called in to search for a gear (the 1,400-pound Frisbee) that flew off an offshore oil rig's testing apparatus, went through the roof of a lab and buried itself in a nearby field.

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REGION

## Wikipedia cuts two ways for local firms, companies say

BY JIM T. RYAN  
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Carlisle-based WorkXpress, a technology services company, found that exposure in the online encyclopedia Wikipedia is a double-edged sword.

A reference to WorkXpress in a Wikipedia article about cloud computing — Internet-based software, services and computer hardware space — funneled readers to the company's Wikipedia page, then to WorkXpress' Web page. Such a link is an example of a potentially beneficial cut through the maze of technical generalities on the Internet.

However, WorkXpress may have suffered a wound when a Wikipedia editor accused the company of spamming, targeted its articles for deletion and proposed a ban on future entries.

The editor, known by the screen name Smerdis of Tlön, wrote that WorkXpress didn't meet minimum requirements for a significant business, according to a deletion discussion on the site. Smerdis — a lawyer from Indiana whose real name is Steven Gustafson — wrote there that WorkXpress has not been featured prominently enough in media stories and the company's awards are not significant.

Gustafson said in the discussion that WorkXpress is an example of companies "finding new ways to game the system" to use Wikipedia as an advertising tool.

Treff LaPlante, WorkXpress' president and CEO, said that's a twisted view of what his company has done. WorkXpress' article doesn't spam and

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PAID CONTENT

# Ask the Expert



## UTILITY ANALYST EXPERT

**Q:** What are the advantages of transporting gas and is my company a good candidate for this service?

**A:** Good candidates for the transportation of gas have many advantages including price stability and savings. The regulated utilities often change commodity and make gas cost adjustments quarterly, making it a challenge to predict pricing. With transportation gas, you can purchase longer periods to gain stability in price and obtain savings.

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## TECHNOLOGY EXPERT

**Q:** Is Windows 7 ready for prime time?

**A:** In spite of its new name, Windows 7 is Microsoft Vista with certain improvements. And whether it is ready or not, you will find it installed on almost all new personal computers. Gone are some of its most annoying features, and it does appear to be faster and more stable. However, it lacks support for many older devices, such as wireless networking cards. If you are starting from scratch, your problems should be few. If you are upgrading, you may have to pay extra in order to get everything working in Windows 7, as well as it did in Windows XP.

**James A. Capp**, President & CEO  
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## BUSINESS COACHING EXPERT

**Q:** Coach Jeff, I have spent a lot of money on advertising in the past. I need sales now — where should I spend my money?

**A:** First, look at advertising as an investment, not an expense. As with any investment, you should define what you expect to achieve and your expected return on the advertising investment. Yes, all advertising should provide you with a return. Second, the only way to MEASURE advertising effectiveness is to TEST the ad.

Testing is done by asking your prospects how they heard about you and keeping track of the responses. By doing so, future advertising investments will be made based on history, rather than by guessing. For a list of free tips to increase the return on your advertising investment, visit [www.coachmybiz.com/ask-the-expert](http://www.coachmybiz.com/ask-the-expert).

**Jeff Witmer**, Business Coach  
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This general information is not intended to provide individual advice. Schedule an appointment with a professional to discuss your particular situation and needs. Questions sent to these professionals may be answered in future issues.

# BROADBAND

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Companies that build expensive networks should be able to restrict access and be compensated for competitor use, he said. Open-access provisions would make that more difficult, he said.

In addition to open access, more reporting requirements are part of stimulus awards; and the grants only pay for part of the project, he said. That makes it less attractive for companies, he said.

"Should we do this with our own capital and private investment, or should we go after stimulus funding to do this? We decided to use our own money to expand broadband offerings," Bonsick said.

Other companies said the quality of the systems that other groups propose to build is a larger issue. Some groups applying for stimulus money are overestimating the need for new infrastructure in areas already served by telecom companies. The groups also are hyping their ability to manage and maintain broadband networks, companies said.

"We're concerned. Can these groups execute what they're saying they can execute and deliver the (Internet) speeds they say they can? If not, then we have to question whether a project is viable," said Mike Rhoda, senior vice president of government affairs for Arkansas-based Windstream Corp.

Windstream closed a deal Nov. 10 to acquire Ephrata, Lancaster County-based D&E Communications Inc.

The company did not apply for stimulus money to expand its networks, Rhoda said. The main reasons were that program rules are vague or would require more government oversight of participating companies, he said.

"I don't think we're worried that these could fund competitive business to our own. We're aware we're in competition and accept that," he said.

The viability of networks proposed by groups lacking telecom experience is a legitimate concern, said Randy Eckels, chief operating officer of Lebanon-based Sting Communications Inc. The company builds broadband infrastructure, such as fiber-optic and wireless networks.

Pennsylvania officials in October ranked projects they thought should receive stimulus money, including a Sting Communications proposal to expand fiber-optic networks in the northern part of the state.

Telecoms took exception to groups proposing projects that would duplicate infrastructure in territories they serve, Eckels said. That could be less of a problem in Pennsylvania because the state is ahead of the curve in expanding broadband to under-served and unserved areas, he said.

Five years ago, the state passed Act 183, which required phone companies to make broadband available to customers statewide. In the process, the state gained a better perspective on which areas have and need broadband coverage, Eckels said. Most local telephone and Internet service providers began offering basic broadband services, such as DSL, in 2008.

CenturyLink, Windstream and New York-based Verizon Communications Inc. have until 2015 to make broadband available to customers under Act 183, but each of the companies already met their obligations or are close to completing them, they said.

Although big companies are upgrading their

## Stimulus should add customers, not rules, companies say

Many companies are wary when government starts offering money with strings attached, but they can find an upside, too.

The broadband initiatives in the federal economic stimulus make money available for infrastructure, but also for initiatives to drive increased Internet and computer use.

"We were more supportive of projects that help adoption or help aggregate customers. Anything that can help drive the adoption of technology, we're definitely supportive of that," said David Bonsick, state executive for Pennsylvania and New Jersey for Arkansas-based telecom CenturyLink.

Other companies have said the same thing: New broadband infrastructure will be pointless without customers to use it.

Sometimes the small number of customers in an area makes it prohibitive to run expensive fiber-optic cables or other technologies, said Kelly Lewis, president and CEO of the Technology Council of Central Pennsylvania. By bringing together customers to purchase services, companies can justify the expansion of infrastructure, he said.

The tech council has applied for stimulus money to expand aggregation and adoption programs. It operated similar programs using state grants in the past.

In 2005, the tech council aggregated the state's 29 intermediate units and 501 school districts into one buying power for telecom services, which gave telecom companies new business and reasons to expand infrastructure. The program also reduced school bills by hundreds of dollars a month. In 2007, the tech council helped aggregate companies.

Internet adoption and customer aggregation initiatives are the best use of government money because they're effective at spreading technology without more regulation, companies said.

## Company broadband investment exceeds stimulus

When large telecom companies talk about the money earmarked for broadband Internet infrastructure in the federal economic stimulus package, they're quick to point out that infrastructure investment is part of their core business.

Nationwide, telecom companies spent more than \$126 billion on infrastructure in 2007 and 2008, according to the U.S. Telecom Association.

Here's a look at how some of the largest companies with a presence in Central Pennsylvania spent their money in recent years:

Companies	Total capital investment (2007-08)	Pennsylvania (2008)
AT&T	\$38 billion	\$775 million
Verizon	\$34.7 billion	\$1 billion
Windstream	\$714 million	\$16.1 million
CenturyLink	DNR	DNR

—Jim T. Ryan

networks, they've been slow to expand Internet infrastructure to rural areas with low-density populations, Eckels said.

"It's hard to get the economics to work without some kind of subsidized government project," he said.

The cost per person is a big issue for broadband expansion, said Kelly Lewis, president

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# BROADBAND WIKIPEDIA: Site's guidelines vex some local businesses

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and CEO of the Technology Council of Central Pennsylvania, also known as TechQuest.

However, all the large companies are spending money on infrastructure, he said.

Telecom companies spent more than \$126 billion on infrastructure in 2007 and 2008, according to Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Telecom Association.

Verizon has invested nearly \$18 billion since 2004 to expand its fiber-optic network, which serves more than 18 million homes and businesses nationwide, company spokesman Lee Gierczynski said. Verizon completed fiber-optic lines this year in Highspire, Penbrook and Steelton, and in Lower Swatara, Swatara and Susquehanna townships in Dauphin County, he said.

Verizon did not apply for stimulus money because the company didn't need it, Gierczynski said.

The broadband stimulus isn't perfect, but this is the first time in decades that a lot of people are talking about telecom infrastructure, Eckels said.

"One of the huge benefits is that it has put a large spotlight on this issue," he said. "There's nothing like \$7 billion of public money to drive discussions." ■

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contributes to a broader understanding of cloud-computing technology and providers, he said.

"Wikipedia is intended to be a destination to research anything that's a part of the sum of all human knowledge," he said.

There shouldn't be a problem with including articles about small companies and mentions of them in articles about issues and industries, LaPlante said.

That's one way to view it, said Sam Johnston, a Wikipedia editor who is part of the WorkXpress discussion. Johnston is a consultant for tech firms in Europe.

There's an ongoing debate about how high to set the bar for deletion and inclusion standards, he said.

"On one hand, you could argue that if someone's interested enough in a topic to write an article on it then that's enough, and on the other that we need to set the bar high (like a traditional encyclopedia) so as to have some hope of enforcing quality control," Johnston wrote in an e-mail to the Business Journal.

Current consensus among Wikipedia editors favors deleting articles on non-notable companies if they can't demonstrate a significant media pres-

**"There is a basis of fairness; but like with anything else, people's biases influence it."**

**Treff LaPlante, WorkXpress**

ence and if awards fail to demonstrate that the company is rising among industry peers, he said.

Gustafson said he considers "platform as a service" a buzz word that many companies are using to have their software noticed on Wikipedia. The site ranks high in Google searches, so small companies are using it to gain traffic, he said. To keep standards high, he recommends deletion of any company he finds that appears to be doing the same thing, he said.

"You would be surprised if you picked an encyclopedia up and didn't find Ford Motor Co. or McDonald's," Gustafson said. "But would you expect to see WorkXpress?"

Although Wikipedia can keep up with changing technology, that doesn't necessarily mean every company deserves a place, he said. As companies grow and their research becomes the standard for other technology, they reach significant notoriety, he said.

Johnston abstained from recommending action on WorkXpress' article. He posted a diagram to help explain cloud computing. LaPlante edited the diagram and included WorkXpress.

Johnston changed it back because he only wanted well-known companies in cloud computing, such as Google, Microsoft and Salesforce, a large San Francisco-based competitor to WorkXpress.

"The examples were chosen on the basis that readers already know the companies ... and what they do," Johnston said. "To include non-notable companies has the opposite effect — confusing users while unfairly drawing attention to those non-notable entities."

LaPlante said he disagrees that inclusion of small companies would muddy the waters. The real problem is that Wikipedia's rules are complicated and many editors are anonymous, making it difficult to verify the editor's intentions are not hostile, he said.

"There is a basis of fairness; but like with anything else, people's biases influence it," he said.

William Craig, president of Carlisle-based WebpageFX Inc., agreed. Even if you read Wikipedia's guidelines, there's no guarantee you'll understand the finer points, he said.

A couple years ago, Craig added an

article to Wikipedia about the Murata Business Center, the Carlisle incubator that WebpageFX and WorkXpress call home. Shortly afterward, it was deleted as non-notable. After a few attempts to revise the article to meet standards, Craig said, he gave up because it took too much time and effort. The experience is likely widespread, he said.

"A lot of times it's probably ignorance up front," Craig said. "(The article) has to be very neutral."

That has to change to help legitimate companies add their knowledge to the encyclopedia, LaPlante said. Even the big companies receive traffic from Wikipedia, so that's not the issue, he said.

The platform-as-a-service article on Wikipedia — which describes the cloud computing sector into which WorkXpress fits — gets 9,000 views a month, he said. WorkXpress is featured prominently there, and its article receives 630 views, he said. Of those, 150 funnel to WorkXpress' Web site, or about 9 percent of the company's total traffic, he said.

"We do get traffic," LaPlante said. "People are researching 'cloud computing' and they want to know about it and who the vendors are. I think educating people is the entire point, and we should be a part of that education." ■

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