

The Essentials of Connectivity: Comcast's Internet Essentials Program and a Playbook for Expanding Broadband Adoption and Use in America

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Executive Summary

Low levels of broadband adoption among some groups remain a stubborn problem in the United States. One particularly at-risk group is families with school age children. Given that digital resources are increasingly critical to education, families without Internet access are at a severe disadvantage. Comcast's Internet Essentials (IE) is targeted at low-income families with school-age children who do not have home broadband service.

This report explores how homes that have recently signed up for Comcast's IE service travel the path to becoming engaged online users. It does this in a unique way: an in-depth survey of 1,969 Comcast IE users who signed up for the service in the latter part of 2013. The survey found that the population of IE customers is relatively poorer, more Latino, more female, and somewhat better educated than the population at-large without broadband at home.

This landmark survey offers lessons for all of America on how to increase broadband adoption and use. The key findings are:

Institutions are important drivers in encouraging non-broadband users to adopt broadband, with schools having a preeminent role.

- Children and teachers are highly influential in encouraging families to get broadband:
 - 98% of families said they got IE because their kids needed it for school.
 - 91% said their children influenced their decision to get IE.
 - 60% said teachers at their child's schools influenced their decision to get IE.
- Other institutions exerted influence through expectations:
 - 83% said their child's school expected that students have online access at home.
 - 65% said that banks and financial institutions expect them to have home Internet access.
 - 53% said that health insurance companies expect that they have home Internet access.
 - 50% said that government agencies expect that they have home Internet access.
 - 49% said that their job or employer expects that they have home Internet access.
- Recommendation: Institutions should partner with the full spectrum of broadband adoption initiatives to encourage broadband adoption among client populations.

Social networks are an important ingredient to broadband adoption and engaged use.

- 50% say that all or most of the people in their community have Internet access at home.
- 40% say that all or most of the people in their community have "on the go" mobile access.
- Those who say that most of the people they know have home access are *much more* likely to use the Internet several times a day than those who do not – by a 66% to 51% margin.
- Those who have many home Internet users in their community are more likely to say the Internet helps "a lot" in most areas of their lives, such as staying in touch with family, looking for work, or accessing government services.
- Recommendation: Libraries, schools, and non-profits should create spaces where new users can find the "social effect" that hastens the path to engaged online use.

Training makes a difference in how people engage with the Internet, but there needs to be a variety of training resources to “meet users where they are” in their Internet adoption process.

- 29% took advantage of *either* Comcast IE’s in-person *or* online training resources, and these users are significantly more likely to say the Internet helps their kids with school work, how they access government services, and look for or apply for jobs.
- 48% say that the most helpful way to learn new things is to teach themselves through reading or online videos and another 30% say it is through their children.
- Recommendation: Broadband adoption programs should collaborate with online learning resources such as those available at Khan Academy or PowerMyLearning.org that can help with education and digital skills.

Broadband adoption programs are an important resource for economic advancement for new home Internet users.

- 68% said a reason for getting broadband access at home was to get health and medical information online.
- 62% said they needed it to look for or apply for jobs.
- 90% said the Internet helps them “a lot” or “somewhat” to do schoolwork.
- 69% said the Internet helps them “a lot” or “somewhat” to stay in touch with family, friends, and neighbors.
- 59% said the Internet helps them “a lot” or “somewhat” to get access to government services.
- 57% said the Internet helped them “a lot” or “somewhat” for job searches.
- Recommendation: Stakeholders focused on economic and community development must make appropriate investments to facilitate broadband adoption at home.

The technology context of new home Internet users is important to understand in program design.

- New Comcast IE customers have experience with technology:
 - 72% have used the Internet from places other than home before getting IE.
 - 50% once had home Internet service at some point in the past.
 - 85% have desktop or laptop computers.
 - 57% have smartphones.
 - 36% have tablet computers.
- 34% said they had given no consideration to getting home Internet service in the 12 months prior to getting service through IE.
- Recommendation: Stakeholders should undertake periodic community and user needs assessments to facilitate dialogue on what strategies work to close broadband adoption gaps.