



### III. BROADBAND USE IN TENNESSEE

Connected Tennessee's mapping and research have provided data-driven analyses of the challenges and opportunities to enhance statewide broadband deployment and adoption. As access and adoption rates increased over the last five years, so has the need for digital skills. Connected Tennessee's newest released report, [Digital Workforce Skills and Tennessee Businesses](#) shows that more than seven out of ten Tennessee businesses (71%) say it is "important" or "very important" for potential employees to have digital skills, while two out of five Tennessee businesses (40%) say it is "difficult" or "very difficult" to find employees with the necessary technical skills. Additional key findings from the report include:

- More than three out of four unemployed Tennessee Internet users (78%) go online to find jobs.
- More than three out of ten Tennessee businesses (31%) use the Internet to advertise job openings or accept job applications.
- One in ten Tennessee businesses need employees to be able to write software, while one in twelve says new employees need to be able to create mobile applications or "apps."
- Three out of ten Tennessee businesses allow their employees to telework, while nearly as many (29%) provide their employees with the tools necessary (such as cell phones, laptop computers, or tablets) to work remotely.

[Digital Workforce Skills and Tennessee Businesses](#) demonstrates that businesses in Tennessee widely recognize the benefit of using technology to stay competitive, while attracting and retaining skilled employees.

As a growing number of residents go online, Tennessee businesses will increasingly need to rely on high-quality and reliable Internet connections to remain competitive. Broadband and technology can provide these organizations new opportunities to sustain, succeed, and grow through increased revenues, decreased costs, improved communications, enhanced efficiency, and expansion into new markets.

Small businesses in particular are key to economic growth in Tennessee. These organizations maintain a vital role in fostering vibrant communities and promoting healthy local economies through new entrepreneurial opportunities and billions of dollars in annual revenues to the state.

There are countless examples statewide of small and micro businesses utilizing broadband to promote and grow their organizations.

[E.T. Reavis](#) in Dresden, Tennessee is a small 120-year old, family owned, clothing store. The store features unique styles and sizes (sizes range from 6 months to a 74 waist) that the larger, well-known department stores don't carry anymore. The store's distinctive items have caught the attention of everyone from the History Channel to the Minnesota Timberwolves. And with 90% of their revenue now coming from online sales, the company shows no signs of slowing down. Transitioning with the times by moving the business to the Internet literally changed the course of the entire business. "The Internet has relieved me of competition locally," says Tom. "Instead of having to rely on the local economy for sales, I rely on the whole United States."

[Lodge Cast Iron](#) in a small town of South Pittsburg nestled in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee might not seem like a likely location for a booming, worldwide Internet business, but out of this tiny community comes

the finest cast iron cookware in the world. They first went online in 2000 and today their website draws nearly one million visitors a year! The content of the website is managed in-house by the Customer Service and Marketing departments. And with a customer base from all over the world, broadband technology is fundamental to the continued success of the company.

“By incorporating the production and marketing programs to reach various sectors of the market, the Internet is the most cost-effective tool,” notes Lodge Cast Iron’s V.P. of Manufacturing, Michael Whitfield. “Additionally, electronic communication enhances the ability of companies to communicate with customers and suppliers on all levels of bidding for projects and financial transactions.”

## Tennessee Broadband Conference

Connected Tennessee hosted its first summit in downtown Nashville on February 27, 2013. Several regional leaders and experts facilitated eight breakout sessions focusing on the implementation of broadband in sectors such as public safety, education, healthcare, economic development, and in rural communities. The Summit brought more than 150 attendees to the Nashville Public Library on Church Street for a day-long event with informative sessions, and special presentations, Metro Nashville Public Schools announced a spring summit dedicated to technology in education, in partnership with Connected Tennessee. Attendees learned about broadband best practices in the state, discussed strategies to address remaining barriers to broadband access, adoption, and use, and networked with other leaders working to bridge the digital divide.

Several regional leaders and experts facilitated eight breakout sessions focusing on the implementation of broadband in sectors such as public safety, education, healthcare, economic

development, and as well as in rural communities. Moderators and panelists included Assistant Commissioner David Purkey, Tennessee Department of Homeland Security and Safety; Dr. Kecia Campbell-Ray, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools and the Martin Professional Development Center; Leigh Sterling, East Tennessee Health Information Network; Liza Massey, Nashville Technology Council; and Ted Townsend, Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development.



The Tennessee Broadband Conference provided an opportunity for those with broadband issues to network and develop solutions. It offered a neutral venue for raising concerns, finding answers, and learning new techniques. The interest and sizeable participation in the inaugural event illustrated the need and desire for an impartial broadband and technology advocate to which concerns, questions, and issues can be raised regarding a constantly evolving industry

A [short documentary](#) about Connected Tennessee’s Computers 4 Kids (C4K) program was shown and Joshua Grubb, former C4K participant, provided attendees with insight on the impact the program has had on his life.

Connor Dixon, also a former C4K participant and Boys & Girls Club Youth of the Year, spoke about the impact the computer and printer donations have on the youth in the clubs.

The Broadband Hero Awards were presented to three organizations for their contributions in the areas of broadband access, adoption, and use:

- The **Broadband Hero Award for Access** was received by Dave Aguzzi on behalf of Tennessee’s Department of Children Services for its efforts to increase broadband access for Tennessee foster youth through individual laptop donations.
- The **Broadband Hero Award for Adoption** was given to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tennessee, and accepted by Dan Jernigan, president and CEO of the Middle Tennessee Clubs, for enabling digital literacy training and online learning programs to the youth they serve.
- The **Broadband Hero Award for Use** was presented to Michael Dumont and Tatiana Sankey of VisionPerry for its successes in providing computer training and job placement for unemployed and underemployed citizens in rural Tennessee communities.

*The opportunity here with this particular conference is excellent to get the decision makers in the smaller communities to come and see what the potential is; and with the success stories, say ‘here is how we do it,’ use it as a model to implement in their own community, and have the support from the state to be able to do that.*

-Stephen Meyer of Excalibur Integrated Systems, Inc.

Michael Ramage, associate director of the Center for Telecommunications Systems Management at Murray State University, was also honored as the first-ever inductee into the Connected Tennessee Broadband Hall of Fame. Prior to his return to academia last year, Ramage led Tennessee’s state broadband initiative as the first executive director of Connected Tennessee from 2007-2012.