

## Best Buy, Microsoft join FCC in bid to boost broadband

By Mike Snider, USA TODAY Updated 13h 39m ago Comments 17 Reprints & Permissions Best Buy and Microsoft are among companies partnering with the Federal Communications Commission on a plan to help the 100 million Americans without high-speed Internet service.

Toby Talbot, AP

A.J. Bowen of Schupp's Line Construction, Inc. works on fiber-optic installation in Norton, Vt.

EnlargeCloseToby Talbot, AP

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The "Connect to Compete" public-private initiative, to be announced Wednesday by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, aims to assist the broadband-challenged — many of whom are poor, unemployed or live in rural areas — from falling behind in today's tech-centric economy. Plans include offering Internet skills classes, digital tutoring and job certification programs online and on-site at Best Buy stores, libraries and schools.

U.S. broadband adoption (68%) currently falls far below that of countries such as Singapore and South Korea (each at 90%), Genachowski notes. "If we can take the broadband adoption rate to 100%, we will have doubled the size of the broadband market in U.S.," he says. "That's millions of more consumers online that will help boost our economy and our leadership position in the global economy."

Much of the training is aimed at better preparing applicants for current job openings, he says. More than 80% of Fortune 500 companies, including Target and Wal-Mart, require job seekers to apply online.

"More and more jobs in our economy require basic digital literacy, There's a skills mismatch that we need to tackle," Genachowski says. "Even in this challenging economy, there are many jobs available that ... are going unfilled because (applicants) require basic digital literacy."

### Breaking down the initiative

Private-sector companies join non-profit groups to offer basic and advanced digital literacy training and certification, including commitments from:

- Best Buy will enlist Geek Squad teams in 20 cities to offer on-site courses in basic digital literacy skills such as using the Web and e-mail. The Geek Squaders will also train trainers that will then go conduct classes through groups such as Goodwill, the Boys & Girls Clubs, 4-H and the National Urban League. The program will expand to more cities next year.

- Microsoft will begin offering free training in job skills, including certification courses in Microsoft Office at libraries, schools and community colleges in 15 states over three years. Also under construction: an online training center for independent study.with videos and other easy-to-follow content.

- Increased funding for public libraries to offer training and for school computer labs to stay open for after-hours classes.

- Online job sites CareerBuilder.com and Monster.com will provide job-search resources. CareerBuilder.com, is jointly owned by The McClatchy, Tribune and Gannett, parent of USA TODAY.

- Free résumé-writing, job skills training and other e-learning resources will be provided online by online job-hunting/tutoring service Brainfuse, e-training company Metrix Learning and Discovery Education, a subsidiary of Discovery Communications. A virtual digital literacy classroom is in the works from Arise Virtual Solutions.

To assist the almost 20 million rural consumers bypassed by broadband, Genachowski has proposed that the monthly surcharge designated on phone bills for expanding phone service be shifted to providing universal access to broadband.

That proposal will be discussed at a Senate Commerce Committee hearing Wednesday and by the FCC later this month. "This transformation will bring broadband to millions who don't have broadband infrastructure now," Genachowski says.

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