



Empowering Philadelphia's Families and Innovators Through the Internet

By David L. Cohen | April 23, 2015

Comcast Executive Vice President David L. Cohen makes the case for the company's Internet Essentials program — and offers ways you can help diminish the digital divide.

[Philly Tech Week](#) is a time to celebrate technology, including the incredible innovations and advances we are making as a city and a country. This week, attendees will hear from some of our great city's most successful technology leaders as well as from exciting new startup entrepreneurs.

Without the power of the Internet, most, if not all of these innovations, would not be possible. So, it's an opportune time to talk about the importance of the Internet and how we can come together as a community to help get more people in Philadelphia connected to it.

Today, the Internet is a gateway for education, employment, healthcare, communication, entertainment and so much more. Yet, according to the U.S. Census' American Community Survey, here in Philadelphia, just 47 percent of low-income households, those with incomes under \$35,000, have broadband Internet at home.

To help address this so-called "digital divide," in August 2011, we introduced [Internet Essentials](#), the nation's largest and most comprehensive broadband adoption program. It provides low-cost broadband service for \$9.95 a month; the option to purchase an Internet-ready computer for less than \$150; and multiple options to access free digital literacy training in print, online, and in person.

Now, three-and-a-half years later, we are proud to say that we have connected more than [450,000](#) families, or 1.8 million low-income Americans, to the power of the Internet at home. In the Philadelphia metro area, we have connected more than 15,000 families, benefitting 60,000 low-income Americans, making the city number nine on our top 10 biggest cities list and making the Philadelphia School District fourth-best behind only Chicago's, Miami-Dade's and Broward County's school districts. This is despite the additional challenges presented by a city with the highest rate of poverty of all of the nation's 10 largest cities.

[The School District of Philadelphia](#) and its superintendent, [Dr. William Hite](#), have been crucial partners in our quest to close the digital divide here in Philadelphia. A few weeks ago, Dr. Hite hosted more than 600 attendees at a [Family Literacy Night](#). During the event, he announced a special offer that Comcast is extending in Philadelphia: eligible families who have not yet signed up for Internet Essentials for the first time will receive up to six months of complimentary Internet service if they enroll before May 31. We hope lots of families take advantage of this opportunity — and in fact, nearly 100 families requested Internet Essentials applications at that literacy event.

Comcast has sponsored and attended hundreds of community events, just like the Family Literacy Night, here in Philadelphia and across the country. Consistent with all the research, we have found that the most significant barrier to Internet adoption is a bucket of digital literacy-related issues, including a perceived lack of need or relevance, so we also partner with locally-based nonprofits to host free digital literacy training classes. These classes help introduce the power and capabilities of the Internet to those who may not fully understand what it is and how to use it.

Nationally, we have invested more than \$225 million in cash and in-kind support to help fund digital literacy initiatives, reaching more than 3.1 million people. Locally, we have partnered with [LIFT Philadelphia](#), [Philadelphia Opportunities Industrialization Center \(OIC\)](#), [People's Emergency Center](#), [Career Wardrobe](#) and others to hold free computer and Internet training classes that include topics from setting up an email address to searching and applying for jobs online. In 2014, we hosted 125 classes that trained 3,100 Philadelphians, and we expect to host almost as many classes this year in North and West Philadelphia.

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Success in our hometown is important to the success of the Internet Essentials program nationwide, and while we are pleased with our progress, we have more work to do.

This is why we need your help.

As leaders within the technology community here, we ask you to join us to get more families connected to the resources they need to succeed in today's highly competitive digital world.

Here are a few ideas:

- Volunteer with a nonprofit like LIFT, OIC, the [Mayor's Commission on Literacy](#), or at one of the more than 50 [Keypoints](#) in Philadelphia that provide digital literacy training.
- Other organizations like the [Boys & Girls Clubs](#) of Philadelphia, [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#), [YMCAs](#) and [PALs](#) can also put your knowledge and expertise to good use.
- Donate your used computer equipment to [Nonprofit Technology Resources](#), the [Philadelphia Children's Foundation](#) or a local school.
- Tell friends and family about the Internet Essentials offer running now, so they can help spread the word about the special promotion we are running.

Let's use Philly Tech Week 2015 as the chance to continue the dialogue about the importance of access to the Internet, which has the power to transform lives, strengthen communities and inspire a new generation of leaders.

[Click here to learn more about partnering with Internet Essentials.](#)

For more information or to sign up for the program, families can visit [InternetEssentials.com](#) or call 1-855-846-8376, or, for Spanish, visit [InternetBasico.com](#) or call 1-855-765-6995.

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