



# ***DELIVERING BROADBAND WHERE MOST WON'T***

THE SURF INTERNET STORY

 **SURF**Internet

## **A COMMITMENT TO SERVING** *the unserved in the Great Lakes region*

If you look at a map of the United States and run your finger along the southern curve of Lake Michigan—through Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan—you're in Surf Internet territory. Surf Internet started as a wireless internet company more than twenty years ago. They began investing in fiber in 2018 and launched their first fiber construction project in 2020. A partnership with Bain Capital Credit in 2021 was the catalyst for a full-speed-ahead approach to fiber. In these early years alone, Surf Internet has already passed 70,000 homes and has 18,000 customers on fiber. They expect their fiber availability and take rate to double year over year.

But ambitious fiber expansion is only half of the Surf Internet story. The statement that Surf Internet calls its mantra helps explain their broader, community-minded goals: "We believe that high-speed, reliable internet service is the great equalizer." As a company that broke ground on its fiber network amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Surf Internet understands how critical the internet is to the people who live in its communities, which range from small cities like Elkhart, Indiana (population 53,000) to sparsely populated rural areas. "One of the things that happened over the last couple of years with the pandemic is you see a shift in thinking toward a quality internet connection and how essential that

reliability is for everyday life," says Joel Richardson, Surf Internet's Customer Operations Manager. "We were dealing with people who absolutely lived, worked and thrived based on the quality of their internet connection."

Surf Internet is committed to bringing internet to underserved and unserved places other broadband service providers don't pursue, because the significant investment required to bring fiber-optic internet to rural areas is considered financially unviable. Surf Internet is less interested in competing with other providers than with making sure that every person has access to a high-speed, fiber connection.

Bringing internet to underserved communities isn't a hidden agenda—it's front and center as part of Surf Internet's commitment to the areas they serve. Surf Internet wants customers to know that serving the unserved is part of its DNA. A recent customer education piece says, "Until now, smaller, rural communities have lacked affordable access to the capabilities that fiber-optic internet provides. With our dedicated focus to expand throughout the Great Lakes, we're able to bring this advanced service right to our customers' door."

## CHANGING LIVES

### *in small communities*

Constructing fiber networks in smaller cities and rural communities takes determination, commitment, and effort. Surf Internet's leadership spends the time needed to attend city council meetings, build relationships with local leaders and residents, explain the practicalities of fiber construction, and educate people about how fiber-optic networks foster economic development for communities with access to them. They point out that fiber helps people work from home, provides greater access to healthcare (via telehealth), and gives children better tools for schooling. When Surf Internet brings fiber to a community, local businesses' power to work in a modern world is transformed, and the value of fiber-connected homes goes up 3-5%.

***...the value of fiber-connected homes goes up***  
**3-5%**

Surf Internet is largely privately funded, but also supplements that funding with government grants where possible. From the outset of a project, Surf's leaders strive

for clarity about what it takes to bring fiber to a community, from the earliest planning stages to the moment when fiber is available and beyond. A recent Surf Internet outreach document for government officials in Michigan says, "Projects are only successful through cooperation and partnership with the local communities. It's important for the city government to understand and help communicate the process to the local residents in order to bring this amazing technology to each home. Surf strives for transparency when educating about what to expect during construction." Clarity in communication and understanding is vital for everyone's success: the end customers, local leaders, and the Surf Internet team.

## A CUSTOMER-FIRST APPROACH

Building fiber is just the start; Surf Internet's corporate mission and values are also reflected in their pricing model. Surf Internet offers "Price-Lock for Life," meaning that the price at which a customer first signs up will stay the same (for the same speed/level of service) as long as the customer stays on that plan with Surf, without annual increases or added fees. They remove barriers to entry by offering free installation as a standard practice and not requiring a contract. Currently, Surf Internet offers symmetrical 1 Gig fiber and plan to start offering 2 Gigs soon.

***The success of Surf Internet in bringing high-speed fiber-optic broadband to rural communities is reflected in the comments of the people who have benefited from their expertise.***

Iosco, a small township in Michigan—about halfway between Lansing and Ann Arbor, as the crow flies—is the site of Surf Internet's fiber expansion. "Iosco Township is a rural farming community with under 4000 residents, which did not make us appealing to large internet providers," says Iosco Township Clerk Julie Dailey. "Internet options in our area were minimal

and very expensive. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the need for rural residents to have good and affordable internet service. When ARPA funding became available, the Township Board entered into a partnership with Surf Internet to further build out fiber services. Surf Internet's willingness to bring fiber to our area was literally life-changing for many of our residents. They can now work from home, educational resources are readily available, and home entertainment options are now limitless." With growth on the agenda for Surf Internet, stories like these will only multiply.

# THE RIGHT PARTNER

## for expansion

Ambitious growth goals, hard-to-reach underserved areas, and customer-friendly pricing models mean that Surf Internet relies on the right business partners to get the job done. In this regard, Surf's long partnership with CHR Solutions is vital to their success. Surf Internet relies on CHR Solutions' engineering services for help in the design and construction of their fiber network. Of particular importance for Surf Internet are the geospatial dashboards that CHR offers their engineering clients.

Using geographic information system (GIS) technology, CHR combines visual map data with near-real-time information about fiber projects. At a glance, Surf Internet is able to see the most vital details of their fiber construction, including:

**Permitting Data** As Surf Internet applies for permits to expand their fiber network—whether by aerial or burial means—CHR's dashboards offer the latest information about permit status. This information allows Surf Internet to address roadblocks in the permitting process before they affect the schedule, or pivot their plans in the event of permitting issues. The combination of being able to see the poles on the map of their area, the ability to drill down into the status of each pole, and the fact that everyone at Surf

Internet who needs to see it has access to it in a user-friendly, easily understood format has been particularly useful for the Surf team.

**Financial Data** A clear picture of the project expenses and the ability to monitor finances in near real time allows Surf Internet to be flexible and quickly plan for both shortfalls and surpluses.

**Construction Data** Having their fingers on the pulse of construction status every day offers multiple benefits: Surf Internet can be more efficient about planning and ordering materials, and faster speed to market makes for a better overall customer experience. Surf Internet can give communities realistic estimates about when service will be available. "CHR is helping us accelerate our fiber-to-the-home deployment and scale our design efficiently," says Surf Internet Chief Operating Officer Deborah Crawford.

Together, Surf Internet and CHR Solutions have developed a partnership built on shared goals and focused on the outcome: expanding Surf's fiber-optic network to more and more communities in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and beyond.

# ***BUILDING A STRONGER REGION***

Surf Internet's commitment to reaching unserved and underserved communities is the type of dedication that service providers across the country will need as the broadband industry takes on a national project unparalleled since the days when postal service, electricity, and phone service were extended to every home in the United States.

***And, in the end, it's all about people.***

CEO Gene Crusie puts Surf Internet's commitment to local communities in simple, human terms: "We're your neighbors, we live together, we work together, we go to church together. We run into each other at the grocery store and we just happen to support your internet. We want to be thought about as real people." This focus on people is at the heart of Surf Internet, and with the right business plans and partners like CHR Solutions, the people of the Great Lakes region are in good hands.

***FIND OUT HOW CHR CAN HELP YOU***

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