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Two years ago, only about 2% of American workers were performing their job duties from home. But that percentage has been climbing ever since, and spiked to more than 25% this past spring thanks to safety restrictions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Accommodations for those who prefer or need to work at home could be a silver lining for places such as Johnstown in this challenging coronavirus period and beyond – if we can capitalize. People are seeking out communities that offer amenities such as outdoor recreation, with affordable housing and a reasonable cost of living. They also want places with little congestion and lower virus rates, so they and their families can feel safe.

Our recent poll found that about two-thirds of readers preferred working remotely. Johnstown and the Cambria-Somerset region check all of those boxes. And COVID-19 has reinforced that there are many jobs that can be done successfully with a laptop in your own home. "I think remote working is the way of the future for certain business sectors," Debi Balog, workforce development director for Johnstown Area Regional Industries, told reporter Russell O'Reilly for an Oct. 3 Business section package. "The pandemic caused an immediate transformation," Balog said. "... Businesses are offering remote work to help fill critical job openings."

The key to attracting more work-at-home professionals to our region is electronic infrastructure, said Deborah Smith Cook, founder and CEO of Atheseus, a Washington, D.C., consulting company. That means access to high-speed internet service, which is also crucial for the current education environment and can be a big help for traditional economic sectors such as agriculture.

Cambria County is using COVID-19 CARES Act funding to expand broadband service in the rural northern tier of the county. Somerset County is offering internet hotspots at its libraries, while Greater Johnstown School District set up enhanced service for students who live in public housing neighborhoods. Folks living and working remotely in our communities also need reliable high-speed web service. "Broadband is one must-have if a community is looking to bring workers into their community," Cook said.

Leaders with JARI, the Cambria Regional Chamber and other organizations are maneuvering to enhance the draw for folks who choose to work at home – even if the job is based in Washington, D.C.; New York City or elsewhere. Eric Reighard, 34, a Richland High School graduate, told O'Reilly he moved back to Johnstown in January 2019, with his wife, a cyber-school teacher, when Reighard took a job working remotely with Problem Solutions of Ebensburg.

Pennlive
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state polls shows
Joe Biden growing
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Pennsylvania

Washington (PA)
Observer-Reporter
Op-ed by
Washington County
Democratic
Chairman: Rural
areas need to thrive,
grow

Now, Reighard is leading a group looking to invest in downtown Johnstown by refurbishing the State Theater for films, symphony concerts and other entertainment – all close to lodging, dining and the community's many other attractions. Mike Kane, president of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, called the work-from-home trend an "opportunity" for Johnstown. "In an organic way, we are already seeing it happen," Kane said. "We are seeing some people move to the community. That reinforces the notion to put an organized push together."

Cambria Regional Chamber President Amy Bradley called Johnstown a perfect place for people to work remotely." We urge area business leaders to get involved with the push to expand our options for professionals who want or need to work at home in a great community. – ***Johnstown Tribune-Democrat*** editorial

In the foothills outside of San Luis, 15-year-old Carmelita Rael struggles to get consistent internet access, which is a real problem because the Centennial School District is 100% online due to the pandemic. "It's been hard," Carmelita said.

Like many other homes, the Rael family ranch is miles from town and surrounded by hills. "We don't have access to broadband, or fiber optic, or any of those things. Even our cellphones don't work when we are here at the ranch," said Carmelita's mother, Kimba Rael. Kimba is also the school principal. She says her family's only option is to pay for satellite internet. "Right now, we have the dish on the side of the house, but if the clouds become too heavy, then you have no access. If the wind is blowing too strong, and its shaking, you don't have any access," she said.

When there's no access, they sometimes load up into the truck and drive to a cemetery at the top of a nearby hill. It has line of sight to cell towers, so Carmelita can use the WiFi hotspot on her phone to access the internet. The Rael family is not alone in this struggle. Toby Melster, the superintendent for Centennial School District R-1, says about 20% of his students struggle with consistent internet access, and that's obviously affecting learning. "Things are not getting done, and it's not necessarily their fault," Melster said.

Melster says cost is one problem. Thanks to grants, his students have devices. But many still lack connectivity. He says T-Mobile donated 50 hotspots. Rural cellphone provider Viaero Wireless donated five more. But some students still can't connect from home due to terrain and lack of signal. "I know it's causing some frustration, and aggravation, anxiety, not only with the students but with our teachers. I can't say enough about them," the superintendent said.

Melster is planning to apply for grants to add towers. He says the scaled-down \$30,000 to \$50,000 plan would add 30-foot towers on top of school buildings. But, Melster says that won't help everyone. "Because we are in the valley and we are surrounded by the hills and the mountains, we need some that are farther out and up," he said. But the other option is pricey. The superintendent wants to put four to five large towers across the district, but that could cost \$1.5 million.

Melster hopes he can work with area providers, the state and community to get consistent internet access for all students. "My kids need it just as much as anybody else," Melster said. In the surrounding areas, Jade Communications staff say they have added at least 100 internet circuits for students in need, using a combination of fiber optics and antennas.

Viaero Wireless is offering discounted programs for districts and students, including one called **ConnectEd**. Melster and Rael know there are students across the state with the same issues. They hope a solution can be found for all of them. "I think everybody deserves to have access, and to have options," Rael said. – ***KDVR-TV, Denver***

Measurement and tech firms are working to develop brand-safety tools for advertising on streaming TV, a growing sector that lacks some of the infrastructure that advertisers expect in digital media. But their efforts face hurdles, including a hesitation among streaming-TV platforms, TV app owners and other ad sellers to share more data with the firms and advertisers.

DoubleVerify Inc., a measurement and ad-verification company that makes brand-safety software for digital media, is introducing a tool that lets advertisers target or avoid specific streaming TV apps by creating inclusion and exclusion lists. Such lists are common in digital media, but aren't widely available on internet-connected TV. The tool can also tell marketers which streaming-TV apps ran their ads, a trail that can be hard to pin down in certain situations.

Other ad-tech companies offering some type of brand-safety or fraud management tools for streaming TV include MadHive Inc., White Ops Inc. and Integral Ad Science Inc. Marketers [are calling for more transparency](#) and control in streaming TV, a fast-rising advertising channel as consumers spend more time streaming movies and shows through connected TV sets. Ad spending on connected TV, while still a fraction of traditional TV, will reach almost \$8 billion in the U.S. this year and is likely to total \$15.6 billion in 2023, according to research firm eMarketer.

Without better tools, however, marketers are afraid they are spending more money than necessary and finding their ads running in places they would rather they didn't. "Our brands cannot appear in areas that would not align with our brand values," said David Spencer, assistant manager of audience buying strategy for General Motors Co. , which has been increasing its media spend on connected TVs while also calling on ad sellers and tech intermediaries [to be more transparent](#).

Part of the problem, though, is that marketers increasingly buy ads in streaming TV through automated marketplaces that draw inventory from multiple apps—and not everyone follows the same conventions in identifying apps or the ad impressions available in them. Just 23% of ad auctions in connected TV use app identifiers that adhere to standards recommended by the Interactive Advertising Bureau, a digital advertising industry-trade group, DoubleVerify said. "Today, it's relatively ungoverned in the connected TV space," said Dan Slivjanovski, chief marketing officer of DoubleVerify.

To remove ambiguity, DoubleVerify said it has mapped more than 6,000 apps by their real-world names, and can trace ad impressions back to the apps' unique identifiers across app stores from connected-TV platforms including Amazon.com's Fire TV, Apple TV and various smart TVs and set-top boxes. Scammers also create their own connected-TV apps, releasing them in TV app stores and receiving few downloads, but luring ad money with simulated ad impressions.

More streaming-TV advertisers are shifting their automated buys into private marketplaces partly to avoid ad fraud, said one ad-agency buyer who plans to spend \$15 million this year on streaming-TV advertising, more than double what he spent last year. About two-thirds of his streaming-TV buys are now direct deals, which include such invite-only marketplaces, versus open auctions.

But even private marketplaces don't always give buyers enough control to ensure their brands show up only in programming appropriate for them, the buyer said. This is partially because different ad sellers—whether operating-system platforms such as Roku Inc. or Amazon Fire TV, media owners of individual apps, or a galaxy of intermediaries between sellers and buyers—report back very different information, said Dave Morgan, chief executive of ad-tech firm Simulmedia Inc.

Some apps, for instance, will provide detailed information on the programs in which ads ran, while some device platforms only disclose how successfully ads reached their intended audiences across many apps. Platforms can be limited on what data they can share under the terms of their contracts with media partners, ad executives said. It can also seem in the platforms' best interests to avoid identifying the individual apps and programs where ads run, lest buyers take their business directly to those apps.

But the chance to pull ad money away from traditional TV, where companies spend roughly \$70 billion a year in the U.S., is a big incentive to open up. The industry will come along, said Mark Zagorski, chief executive of DoubleVerify, which next wants to get streaming-TV advertisers more information about the various apps' content, user ratings and age-appropriateness. "Until there's better measurement and confidence in the space, that \$70 billion in U.S. TV ad spend isn't going to make it there," he said. – *Wall Street Journal*



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