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"I thought I couldn't do it because I didn't have Wi-Fi in my house, so my computer wouldn't work," says 15-year-old Nadia Ibarra. She's a freshman at the Moulton Independent School District, where about 20% of students also needed internet help when schools went virtual in the spring. "I would try to do most of it on my phone but some subjects I couldn't get to do them because it wouldn't work — it wouldn't let me. I had a lot of problems doing it on my phone," Ibarra remembers.

The A and B student started seeing more Cs and Ds. "It would bring my grades down whenever I did it on my phone because some, I wouldn't turn them in on time or I wouldn't do them," she says. About 15 minutes away, staff at Shiner Independent School District took a survey to find that roughly 15% of their families also lacked proper internet connectivity. We tried to think, 'OK, what are ways we can help them?' says superintendent Alex Remschel. Two rural school districts were facing the same problem: Shiner with roughly 600 students and Moulton with half that population.

Enter: The [\*\*Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative\*\*](#). "What is it that the schools need and what can we do to help them?" Darren Schauer, GVEC CEO, said of the company's initial brainstorming of ways to make a difference. He says the utility company hooked up Shiner's parking lot to become a hotspot — roughly a \$200,000 move. "There would be cars spattered throughout the parking lot and ... parents sitting there with their kiddo working on schoolwork," Remschel remembers. "We were already providing broadband out in most of the rural areas in which we serve electrically, so it was just a matter of being able to meet the other needs in a faster manner because of the onset of COVID-19," Schauer says.

GVEC also provided Moulton with 20 hotspots with unlimited data. The district only has to pay \$40 per month per device. Normally, the district's technology officer says, each one would cost about \$200 to purchase, plus another \$100 a month for *limited* data. "It was a really big relief," Ibarra says. Not just for her, but for another struggling friend, too. "She would call me and she would be like, 'I don't understand this' and 'My phone doesn't work, it's so slow, I don't have much of my work done,'" Ibarra says. "And she doesn't even talk English, so she would have more trouble."

Ibarra says she helped her friend get a hotspot device from the school. The price tag isn't lost on Schauer. "It's a challenge to build out these networks in rural areas where population is obviously less, the density is less. To be able to financially justify those types of investments is a challenge," Schauer says. He says since co-ops are tax-paying, not-for-profit businesses, they're more poised to make those investments. "Certainly we have to make enough money to earn a return on our investment, but it's not our primary motivation," Schauer says.

There are a total of 67 electric co-ops in Texas. A group called Texas Electric Cooperatives represents them and says they're serving 39 schools in 18 school districts across the state. But even GVEC's investment doesn't fill the entire gap, long-term, for nearby school districts. "I still don't have Wi-Fi in my house," Ibarra says. According to [\*\*state data published this year\*\*](#), more than 70% of students in middle- and high school need internet multiple times a week for homework. "Some of our families out in the community — being able to access information is still limited and we definitely want to get to a point where that's not an issue," Remschel says.

Some co-ops and school districts — like Shiner and Moulton — are participating in something called Operation Connectivity to help achieve that long-term goal. The program began in Dallas to address the lack of high speed internet and devices for students at home and [\*\*it launched statewide in May\*\*](#). It has a task force that is supposed to meet every month to review progress and overcome roadblocks.

Shiner ISD says it's spent \$20,000-\$30,000 on connectivity since March. Remschel says in case another emergency hits, he feels confident

they'll be able to give each student a mobile hotspot and device. – ***KXAN-TV, Austin***

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The television industry's Holy Grail—targeted advertising in which next-door neighbors could see different commercials during the same TV show—is expected to become a reality next year as a big wall to widespread implementation is about to come down.

Brands crave the ability to direct their TV ads to more specific audiences based on data much as they do when they work with tech giants such as Alphabet Inc.'s Google and Facebook Inc. Many advertisers see the decades-old model for ad sales that relies on wide targeting such as age and gender demographics as outdated.

Nielsen, the nation's leading TV-ratings firm, on Tuesday said it would start measuring such targeted advertising on a national basis next year. The lack of a national measurement system for such ads has been a hurdle for brands and networks. The new system will mark a fundamental shift in how Nielsen tabulates commercial viewership. Instead of calculating an average audience for all ads in a program as is the current practice, it will measure each ad individually, which is necessary for targeted advertising to work.

The move is expected to boost the value of TV commercials, which have been under pressure as broadcast and cable networks have been losing viewers to streaming services and brands have flocked to digital advertising. "This will be one of those grand scenarios where networks are happy, agencies are happy and ultimately the consumer gets a better experience down the line with ads that are more relevant to them," said Nielsen Audience Measurement General Manager Scott Brown.

Nielsen said it was teaming up with AT&T Inc.'s DirecTV and Dish Network Corp. , two of the nation's largest pay-TV distributors, and smart TV manufacturer Vizio. The partnership will give Nielsen data from 55 million devices via smart TVs and set-top boxes. Most targeted ads are now sold locally by pay-TV distributors, which are better equipped to implement and track different commercials that are sent to various ZIP Codes and even households. Advertisers can buy a targeted ad to reach much of the country, but it would have to be done piecemeal, through individual pay-TV distributors.

The lion's share of ad time is sold by TV networks—roughly 14 minutes per hour—to brands whose commercials air in every home that is watching. Jane Clarke, chief executive of the Coalition for Innovative Media Measurement, a consortium of programmers, advertisers and ad agencies that advocate for better audience measurement, expects Nielsen's move to help slow the exodus of ad dollars to digital.

Other challenges remain, including the need for improved technology at many networks to handle the demand for targeted advertising. "The networks have old trafficking systems," Ms. Clarke said, referring to how advertising is inserted into programming. The targeted-advertising television market is about \$2 billion annually. That pales in comparison to the roughly \$70 billion advertisers spend on traditional U.S. TV advertising, according to research firm eMarketer, which tracks both categories. Advertisers are expected to spend \$142.3 billion on digital ads in the U.S. this year, eMarketer said.

One of the holdups to widespread use of targeted advertising has been an inability of brands and TV networks to track the viewership of such ads nationally, which Nielsen's move is now addressing. Nielsen said it expected to start providing preview data in the first half of 2021 with a goal of a full-fledged system up and running later in the year. Nielsen's Mr. Brown said he anticipated other pay-TV distributors, set-top box firms and smart-TV manufacturers to come aboard as well. "We're trying to make partnerships with all the names you would expect to get as much coverage as we can," he said.  
– ***Wall Street Journal***

Comcast has made streaming content aggregation a priority for its X1 and Flex platforms and it appears to be paying off in viewer engagement increases. Rebecca Heap, senior vice president of entertainment and video at Comcast, said today at the Stream TV Show that demand for OTT content is up 80% year over year Comcast's platforms. The company has recently launched streaming services including Peacock, its own ad-supported service, along with Hulu and Sling TV.

Peacock and third-party streaming content has been particularly important for Flex, the aggregation platform that Comcast gives to its broadband-only subscribers. The company recently revealed that more than 2 million Flex devices have been deployed within Comcast's footprint and Heap said that growth in monthly active users on Flex has offset subscriber losses in Comcast's traditional video business. The company lost 273,000 video subscribers in the third quarter.

Near the beginning of the pandemic lockdown earlier this year, Comcast spent about six to eight weeks leaning more heavily into free previews of premium services. In the spring, the company held its annual Watchathon and this year stretched across X1 along with Stream, Comcast's mobile video service, and Flex. Heap said it was the biggest Watchathon ever. Comcast also partnered with Hulu this year to offer some of the service's content for free. Heap said the Hulu titles did extremely well. "We will continue to lean in. We've got free TV week coming up later in November and you'll see a rolling cadence of free, ungated promotional periods going forward," she said. "It is critical to our strategy." – *Fierce Video*



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