BCAP NewsClips

November 16, 2020

CNBC
Comcast to fold Comcast Ventures into corporate business division, focus on strategic investment

New York Times
Fact-Checked on Facebook and Twitter, Conservatives Switch Their Apps

Washington Post
Is election night broken? TV news stuck to old routines amid voting upheaval — and confusion followed.

Philadelphia Inquirer
Pennsylvania is here to stay as a swing state

York Daily Record
Feisty Pa. Lt. Gov. John Fetterman's profile exploding in post-election media appearances

Armstrong's 3rd annual Avenge Hunger Month is helping provide needed resources to over 200 community feeding programs. During the month of September, Armstrong customers, community partners and employees donated 16,167 pounds of food and $17,646 in monetary donations, as well as raising additional awareness via email, social media and Armstrong television commercials.

With many traditional events being canceled and a paramount focus placed on safety, Armstrong's main event was the Avenge Hunger Virtual 5K race, which raised over $8,300 in entry fees and donations. In just three years of avenging hunger, Armstrong, America's 11th largest cable television provider, has collected nearly 100,000 pounds of food and $43,000 in monetary donations to share with community feeding programs. Avenge Hunger Month also helps to increase awareness of Armstrong's Breaking Bread initiative to stock local food pantries and soup kitchens for their busy fall and winter seasons.

While September, National Hunger Action Month, receives the most attention, Breaking Bread is a year-round initiative. Donations of food or money can be dropped off at any of the 15 local Armstrong offices to benefit those who are struggling with hunger and food insecurity across the communities served by Armstrong in West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

"COVID-19 has caused our community food pantries to experience a shortage of resources," said Shane Finster, community marketing manager with Armstrong, in a news release. "We appreciate the ongoing generosity of our customers, community partners and employees to help meet this need." Breaking Bread is celebrating 10 years of supporting community feeding programs across Armstrong's service areas.

This initiative provides food, money, time and increased awareness about the need for food. Armstrong has donated thousands of branded commercials to promote this need in our communities, as well as via social media, email and the Armstrong Neighborhood Channel. – ***Huntington (WV) Herald-Dispatch***

Spotlight PA
Meet Pennsylvania's Electoral College voters: Everything they can — and can't — do

Allentown Morning Call
What can bring Biden and Republicans together? Big money spent on infrastructure, Pa. political leaders say

Associated Press
Trump campaign retreats from key claim in Pennsylvania suit

SEDA-Council of Governments' (SEDA-COG) four-county broadband project has earned the highest POWER grant award out of 12 states' by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), in addition to securing or partnering on two more POWER grants. The ARC recently awarded $43.3 million across 51 projects in 12 states to support economic diversification in coal-impacted communities. More than half of these investments will support recovery-to-work efforts or strengthen broadband infrastructure.

In Pennsylvania, SEDA-COG's project award also was the highest of 12 awarded projects. The council's effort was awarded $2.5 million for internet expansion to underserved areas in Clinton, Lycoming, Northumberland, and Union counties. This project will reach over 1,500 households, including over 20 businesses. Union County served as the main applicant.

Mike Fisher, SEDA-COG assistant executive director, said the grant award shows how powerful projects can happen with a regional effort. "We are honored that our efforts earned the largest POWER grant award in the entire multi-state ARC region," Fisher said. "This shows how vitally important it is for our counties to have better broadband service. It also demonstrates the collective power of our counties working together for the betterment of our communities and businesses."

The grant will supplement $4 million of SEDA-COG's revolving loan funds. The selected internet service provider will match these funds with $1.5 million of private investment funds. SEDA-COG will provide funding through reimbursable grants and low-interest loans to incentivize an internet service provider to expand internet service into unserved and underserved rural regions of the four counties where traditional buildout is otherwise economically infeasible.

SEDA-COG is also part of a statewide broadband initiative in a separate grant, and a partner in a workforce grant. The council was awarded a $108,125 ARC POWER grant to expand internet service in the Snow Shoe Township area in Centre County, and will match the ARC POWER grant with the same amount, offering a $210,000 grant to incentivize internet service providers to provide high-speed internet in the area.

The grant is part of a statewide $1.2 million ARC broadband grant award to the seven Local Development Districts (LDDs) that serve 52 of Pennsylvania's counties. The LDDs are organizations through which member counties share information, address common concerns, and develop regional responses to critical issues. SEDA-COG is one of the seven LDDs and serves 11 central Pennsylvania counties. Additionally, SEDA-COG is a partner in a $1,018,500 recovery-to-work POWER grant awarded to the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation (CPWDC) and Geisinger.

SEDA-COG and the PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams will identify employers that are "recovery friendly" and assist other businesses to become recovery friendly to increase their pool of workforce talent. To accomplish this, SEDA-COG will work with their extensive business service provider network to power this initiative through education and information. Geisinger will focus on expanding telemedicine to broaden access to specialized services, like addiction treatment, in underserved rural areas. SEDA-COG will receive $18,500 for its partnership efforts.

Betsy Lockwood, SEDA-COG grants manager, described the void the initiative fills. "Removing barriers to recovery has been a longstanding issue for people, and workforce issues have plagued businesses. Employers need staff and people need jobs, especially with the effects of the pandemic. By expanding the workforce toward those in recovery, we fill a valuable workforce need while providing someone in recovery a job that can help them remain in recovery," Lockwood said.

SEDA-COG Board President Rich Ridgway said as an 11-county community and economic development agency, SEDA-COG is recognizing and meeting needs. “We know the hardships our residents and businesses are facing. We are working hard to alleviate the most acute pressure throughout our counties, particularly with high-speed internet access,” Ridgway said.
– ***northcentralpa.com***

Brooke Mallers recently bought a used car online, she uses food and grocery delivery services more and she makes telehealth appointments—new habits that she expects to last long after the coronavirus pandemic is over. “I’m not sure I’ll ever go into a car dealership again,” said the 58-year-old retired investor in Boulder, Colo. “It was fun to have an experience that’s new and the internet enables.”

The pandemic’s disruptions have transformed how American consumers behave by accelerating their embrace of digital commerce, and the changes are likely to prove permanent, according to businesses studying and adapting to the changes. A recent survey by consulting firm McKinsey & Co. found that about three out of four people have tried a new shopping method due to the coronavirus and that more than half of all consumers intend to continue using curbside pickup and grocery-delivery services after the pandemic is over. Nearly 70% of consumers surveyed intend to continue buying online for store pickup.

The pandemic collapsed into three months a process of adopting e-commerce that otherwise would have taken 10 years in the U.S., the firm concluded. The lockdowns, social distancing and other effects of the crisis forced many consumers to try online shopping, medical appointments, yoga classes and tutoring services. And people new to the e-commerce game are “finding out it’s pretty useful,” said Brian Ruwadi, a senior partner at McKinsey.

This spurred businesses to step up their digital services. “You see significant movement on both sides, and that has to result in a significant increase, a fundamental shift in acceleration,” he said of the changes in business and consumer behavior. “Consumers won’t go back to shopping the way they did before the pandemic,” said Stefan Larsson, the president of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger parent PVH Corp. “They will go forward into the new normal.” Mr. Larsson, who takes over as CEO early next year, said that means a continued push into e-commerce. As a result, PVH is speeding up digital investments, including building new data systems and warehouses, he said.

The rapid transition has positioned some businesses to thrive and grow, while others struggle or fail, reflecting the broader economy’s K-shaped recovery. Among the winners are those facilitating the shifts, including online retailers and service providers, technology firms and companies delivering the goods people are buying online. Peloton Interactive Inc. said its revenue more than tripled to $757.9 million in the September quarter. The company is capitalizing on surging demand for at-home fitness equipment, much of it internet-connected like its exercise bikes.

Faltering businesses include those unable to make the transition, such as many restaurants and bricks-and-mortar stores. Retail-store closings in the U.S. reached a record in the first half of 2020, and the year is on pace for record bankruptcies and liquidations, according to a report on the downturn’s severity. Some pandemic-driven changes in what people spend money on may prove temporary, such as the shift away from activities requiring proximity to other people. With many Americans still shunning air travel and indoor dining, and with entertainment ticket windows still dark from Disneyland Park to Broadway, consumers spent 7.2% less on services in the third quarter than a year before. That left money to boost purchases of goods by 6.9% over the same period. But much of this could reverse once the virus is subdued.

Meantime, the change in how they buy things looks more lasting and spans generations. “I will never go to a grocery store again in my life because it’s just so convenient and easy” to shop online, said Allan Schilter, an 81-year-old retired accountant in Springfield, Mo. Mr. Schilter picks up his groceries curbside at Walmart, after ordering them online. “It’s safer; you don’t have to go into the store.” E-commerce’s share of U.S. retail sales rose to 16.1% in the second quarter of this year, from 10.8% a year earlier and 0.9% of total retail sales two decades ago, according to the Commerce Department.

At Macy’s Inc., e-commerce now accounts for roughly 43% of sales, up from 25% before the pandemic. To meet the increased demand, the retailer has joined with Google Inc. to improve its search-engine results and added same-day delivery for online orders. “These are new muscles we’ve developed over the last several months,” said Matt Baer, Macy’s chief digital officer. Emily Kennedy said she is glad the pandemic prompted her to start ordering groceries. “Being forced into that situation made me realize how much time I was spending every week walking those aisles,” said Ms. Kennedy, president of Marinus Analytics, an artificial-intelligence company. “People are realizing the time they save and the money they save,” said the 30-year old, who lives near Denver. “Once they get it, they’re reluctant to give it back later on.”

Shifts in consumer behavior are driving development of new distribution methods, such as online-only stores, or “dark stores,” where online purchases are gathered by workers for distribution to customers. Shoppers aren’t allowed in to browse the shelves or squeeze the fruit. Whole Foods Market Inc., which is owned by Amazon.com Inc., opened its first online-only store in Brooklyn, N.Y., in September, part of a strategy to meet increased demand for food delivery. The grocery-store chain and delivery service AmazonFresh have increased overall delivery capacity by more than 160% since March. Whole Foods has increased its pickup locations to all its 500 U.S. stores. The pandemic halted in-store dining, so some stores have repurposed parts of their dining areas as spaces to pack pickup and delivery orders.

The way people pay for things is also shifting in ways likely to last. A July survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco found that 28% of respondents said they are avoiding using cash and using card payments instead due to the pandemic. The pandemic has spurred the more widespread use of contactless payment methods that eliminate the need to even swipe or insert a credit card. Visa and Mastercard both reported global growth in tap-to-pay or contactless transactions this year. In Mastercard’s third quarter, the company said contactless represented 41% of in-person purchase transactions globally, up from 37% in the second quarter and 30% a year ago. Consumer habits can change after someone tries a new way of doing things two or three times out of necessity, said Jonathan Silver, CEO of Affinity Solutions, a firm that aggregates consumer credit- and debit-card spending data. And the pandemic triggered dramatic shifts, he said.

One is the move from bricks-and-mortar gyms to home workouts. Beyond buying treadmills and rowing machines, many consumers are also using internet-connected equipment and apps to enjoy online classes and live-streamed group activities. “I don’t anticipate going back to a gym for years after a vaccine is available,” said Matt Bertenthal, age 37, an attorney at software company Atlassian in San Francisco. Before the pandemic, he used a local gym once or twice a week, spending $110 a month on membership. He stopped going in mid-February amid concerns about the coronavirus. Now he surfs, uses apps for fitness workouts and rides his bike on his deck using a stationary digital training device three to five days a week. He also uses an app to take virtual bike rides with other people. “It’s a really fantastic escape,” he said. – ***Wall Street Journal***

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