

**An information-packed conference agenda must include a night to unwind.**



March 22, 2016

**Fierce Cable  
Verizon taking  
on cable with  
new 'Titan'  
business  
Ethernet  
program**

**Media Post  
NBCU Starts  
Content Studio  
For Branded  
Advertisers'  
Content**

**Christian  
Science  
Monitor  
How Google  
plans to  
improve  
Internet  
service in  
Cuba**

**pennlive.com  
A momentary  
pause: At  
Democratic**

Comcast Corp. has begun selling its TV, Internet and phone service through Amazon.com, marking the cable giant's highest-profile online retail partnership. A new landing page on Amazon.com now welcomes visitors to the "[Amazon Cable Store.](#)" which sells Comcast's Xfinity-branded bundles, including dedicated customer service for Amazon customers.

The deal came about when Comcast Chief Executive Brian Roberts and the cable division's president, Neil Smit, took a trip to Silicon Valley about a year ago, according to a person familiar with the matter. The two talked with Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos about ways to work together, and one idea that came up was selling Comcast products through the e-retailer, the person said.

Over the course of a year, the two companies hashed out a way to sell TV, Internet and phone service in a way that would simplify the process. "They helped us in our thinking about how to simplify the experience and just make it clean," Mr. Smit said in an interview. For example, Amazon helped Comcast reduce the number of clicks that it takes for a customer to complete a transaction. "We're partnering with a company that's so good at the customer experience—I think that's really what excites me."

Amazon will take a fee each time a customer signs up for a Comcast subscription through its site, a person familiar with the deal said. Typical "referral fees" for goods sold on Amazon by third parties can range from [single-digit percentages to 15% or more](#). Mr. Smit said that, down the line, Comcast could sell other products like its home security service through Amazon as well. He said the Amazon sales channel will also make it easier for people who are shopping for a TV set, for example, to be offered Comcast's video service. Comcast said the pricing for bundles on Amazon will be the same as what appears on its own website. The Amazon-Comcast tie-up was [first reported](#) by TVPredictions.com.

[leaders' request, Gov. Wolf agrees to delay threatened budget veto](#)

[Pittsburgh Post-Gazette For many Pennsylvania districts, races will be decided in April primaries](#)

[Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Judge strikes McKeesport Republican legislative candidate from ballot](#)

[KDKA-TV, Pittsburgh Pennsylvania's Republican Presidential System Hard To Understand](#)

[Allentown Morning Call New McGinty ad focuses on wage gap](#)

Charter Communications Inc. is also in discussions with Amazon about a retail partnership, a Charter spokesman said, though no final decisions have been made. An Amazon spokeswoman declined to elaborate on other potential partnerships with cable companies, though Amazon's page appears to be set up to also sell other companies' services.



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Cable companies have long hawked their products both through their own sales channels and some authorized retailers, including brick-and-mortar stores like Best Buy. Comcast is hoping that partnering with Amazon will help improve its brand perception as it seeks to reimagine its customer service, after some poor interactions between Comcast representatives and subscribers went viral in recent years.

The cable giant last May budgeted more than \$300 million toward new customer service efforts such as hiring more representatives and opening more call centers. It's also been renovating its physical stores to give them a more Apple-like feel to

encourage people to play with its products and buy them.

A Comcast spokesman said it has set aside customer call centers in Tucson, Ariz., and Spokane, Wash., employing about 90 representatives trained just to receive inquiries about Comcast sales made through Amazon. The customer representatives' goal is to "answer your call in 60 seconds or less," with no waiting, according to Amazon's landing page. The Amazon site provides an easy link to help customers know how to "avoid leasing fees" by buying their own compatible modems and Wi-Fi routers. The site also promises that people can cancel Comcast subscriptions within 30 days or select a no-term contract to downgrade or disconnect whenever they wish. – *Wall Street Journal*; [more in Philadelphia Business Journal](#)

The best way to expand Internet access in Seattle is through public-private partnerships, Mayor Ed Murray said at a regional broadband conference Monday.

The mayor reiterated the position he formed after a city-commissioned study released last summer showed it would cost between \$480 million and \$665 million to build out a municipal-broadband network across the city. That price tag is less than previously estimated, but the mayor said it was still too much to be feasible. "When I came into office, I was very excited about the possibility of municipal broadband until the study came back and indicated it would be literally the largest tax increase in Seattle," Murray said Monday at the conference, co-hosted by the nonprofit Next Century Cities and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The mayor's office later clarified that financing a municipal broadband system would result in one of the largest tax increases in the city. The \$930 million Move Seattle transportation levy approved by voters last fall may be bigger, depending on the exact cost of municipal broadband. Some residents and interest groups have long pushed for a city-run broadband network, saying it would be less expensive than services from private providers and would help reduce access inequality, known as "the digital divide."

In Seattle, 93,000 homes — about 15 percent of the city's households — don't have access to the Internet. Many are occupied by people with low incomes, the mayor said. A municipal network could help bridge that divide by offering high-speed, affordable Internet access across the city, said Devin Glaser, a policy analyst with Upgrade Seattle, which is working to muster support for a city-run network. "We just passed a \$930 million transportation levy for much-needed things, and the broadband package would be half the price of what was just passed," Glaser said.

After the city study was released, Seattle launched the Digital Equity Initiative, which will be announcing "significant programs" in about a week, Murray said. The city also partnered with Google to lend people Wi-Fi hot-spot devices through the Seattle Public Library, a program Murray said was popular on its first day.

Seattle works with various companies, including telecommunications giants CenturyLink and Comcast, to expand service across the city. The city has said it is working to increase competition in the area, which has long been dominated by CenturyLink and Comcast. Among other things, the city said it is getting rid of some regulatory barriers. Glaser acknowledged that the city is making efforts to increase access, saying "all momentum is good." But it's not enough, he said, to create a level playing field.

Murray hasn't totally ruled out the idea of a municipal broadband system. "There may be strategies that would work. And that may be ultimately the best way to solve the issue of the divide," he said Monday. "We're not going to be able to do it or a lot of things unless we see an aggressive approach by the federal government to work with local jurisdictions to make that possible."

The federal government did finance about 230 broadband projects nationwide through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Those funds are now spent, but municipalities can apply for smaller grants through other federal agencies, said Lawrence E. Strickling, assistant secretary of commerce for communications and information.

Strickling said Monday the federal government helps municipalities by providing guides to funding and other technical expertise. Each community needs to make its own choice about public versus private broadband, he said. "We advocate that it is one of the options that ought to be available for communities," he said of municipal broadband. "A community always has an ability to negotiate stronger (with private partners) when there are other options." Murray said the city will continue working on public-private partnerships, not just for infrastructure but also because "technology is changing so fast" and private companies can help create nimble business models. — **Seattle Times**

The deadline for Pennsylvanians to register to vote in this year's primary election is fast approaching. In order to vote for nominees in the competitive presidential and U.S. Senate races on April 26, state residents must be registered to vote by next Monday, March 28.

Of course, the state has made it easier than ever to register. Last year, it became the 23rd state to offer online voter registration. So far this year, more than 121,000 people have used the new system. Democrats lead Republicans in voter registration by a nearly 1 million voter margin thanks in large part to the Democratic strongholds of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. There are currently more than 4 million Democrats on the voter rolls compared to nearly 3.1 million Republicans, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State.

That advantage has held despite the phenomena of nearly 63,000 Democrats **switching their affiliation** in order to vote in the Republican primary. So far, only 29,000 Republicans have gone in the opposite direction. Compared to 2014, voter registration between the two parties have remained relatively stable. Democrats lost about 30,000 voters. Republicans gained nearly 60,000 — nearly the same amount of Democrats who've switched parties.

How to register to vote:

**Register online by clicking here**

Fill out a **registration form** and mail or hand-deliver it to your county voter registration office (locations on the form).

Active duty military and those who are hospitalized or infirm can **register at any time**. — ***pennlive.com***



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