

Stay safe



March 31, 2020

**Broadband
Technology Report**
[Broadband tech
support in a social
distancing world](#)

Fierce Video
[WOW! CEO Elder
hospitalized after
testing positive for
COVID-19](#)

The Hill
[Op-ed: weren't
ready for a
pandemic
— imagine a
crippling
cyberattack](#)

**Wilkes-Barre Times
Leader**
[Local houses of
worship put services
online](#)

**WPMT-TV, York
WTF, Harrisburg
School District team
up to provide free,
over-the-air
curriculum for
students at home
during COVID-19
outbreak**

**Philadelphia
Business Journal**

Internet usage is up 32 percent and as high as 60 percent in some areas for Comcast, the nation's biggest broadband provider, Tony Werner, president of technology told reporters during a press call Monday. The spiking demand for internet and phone usage during the coronavirus crisis is still well within the company's capacity, he said, which is engineered for spikes and fluctuations.

[Comcast](#) has seen peak usage times change, along with other data points, reflecting the trends of self-quarantine and stay-at-home orders that are becoming common across the country. The peak of downloading appears to be shifting from 9 p.m. to between 7 to 8 p.m., while uploading traffic is moving from 9 p.m. to daytime business hours of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in most cities. An example of downloading would be viewing a news story after clicking on a newspaper website. Uploading is when customers send content to the internet, like sending emails, using a webcam or posting photos to a social media site.

Comcast exec not worried 'in the least' as homebound customers tax broadband network

New York Times Tech Giants Prepared for 2016-Style Meddling. But the Threat Has Changed.

Philadelphia Inquirer Editorial: State budgets will be reeling from coronavirus — but there may be lessons for next time

Washington Post We asked more than 100 tech experts if U.S. should use location data to track coronavirus. They were split.

Pocono Record Need toilet paper? Procter & Gamble largest manufacturing plant, located in Pennsylvania, goes into overdrive during coronavirus crisis



Providing communication services since 1909

- Cable MSO
- Fiber to the Premise
- Unified Voice Services
- PBX Systems and Service
- Residential Voice
- Commercial Voice
- Carrier Solutions
- Text enable any number

Let us show you the reliability, flexibility and cost savings we can bring to your home, business or enterprise!

Visit us at irontonglobal.com

or emails us at

sales@irontonglobal.com

855-226-0530



Weekday usage is up, Werner said, with video conferencing and phone service over the internet seeing a whopping 212 percent increase. Virtual Private Network traffic or VPN use is up 40 percent, reinforcing that many people are working and learning from home now. Phone use is up 65-percent as people need to be on the phone more to communicate. With bars, restaurants and entertainment venues shutdown, people are turning to their devices for gaming, streaming television, and watching videos.

Gaming downloads are up 50% generally and 80% during new releases and the company has seen a 38-percent increase in streaming and web video consumption. Television data show similar patterns. Video on demand has increased 25 percent compared to last year and people are spending four more hours per day watching live television, for a total of 64 hours each week.

Comcast features a "voice remote," which means customers can use verbal commands to change channels and search for programs. Voice remote requests for "free movies" has increased 50 percent. The company also has logged more than 50 million voice remote requests on some days. The work-at-home, stay-at-home trend is evident in cell

phone data as well. Comcast recorded a 10-percent decline in cellular data along with a 24-percent increase in mobile data usage over WiFi, reflecting that many people are using their phones more while at home, connected to their WiFi.

With all the new usage, Comcast said its speed remains as advertised, as company officials continue to "micro-monitor" the network, including 700,000 speed tests per day. That's because the company's policy has always been to anticipate growth in capacity and new customers and stay 12 to 18 months ahead of when the additional capacity will be needed, Werner said. "That's been helpful here," he said. "It allowed us to be ready."

The company is now working to get 12 to 18 months ahead during this already-busy time. Werner said employees executed 1,700 network augments last week, such as laying more fiber and tweaking systems, when 400 to 500 are typical. – **Pennlive**

President Donald Trump has issued a major disaster declaration in Pennsylvania, a day after Gov. Tom Wolf made the request. Wolf made the request to free up federal money that could be used in the state to help in the fight against COVID-19. "The COVID-19 outbreak has taxed our commonwealth and our communities in ways that are almost incomprehensible," Wolf said. "I am calling on the president and the federal government to make available to us the assistance that will make a tangible difference in the lives of our friends and neighbors, and the dedicated public servants who are working in overdrive to support them."

Trump ordered federal assistance which will bring money to state and eligible local governments as well as certain private nonprofit organizations for emergency protective measures, including direct federal assistance, according to a statement from the White House. Pete Gaynor, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator with Department of Homeland Security, named MaryAnn Tierney as the Federal Coordinating Officer for Federal recovery operations in the affected areas.

With the new major disaster designation, the following Individual Assistance programs would be available: Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Crisis Counseling, Community Disaster Loans and the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Program and Statewide Hazard Mitigation. As of Monday, the Pa. Department of Health reports that there are 3,394 positive cases of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania. At least 38 people have died from the virus. – **Pennlive**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has extended a deadline for funding requests by rural communities and businesses seeking to improve high-speed broadband internet access. The department said in a news release Monday that the application deadline for the ReConnect Pilot Program is now April 15.

Rural areas around the country have been clamoring for more high-speed internet access for use in schools, libraries, homes and businesses such as farms. The federal ReConnect program provides loans and grants to help build broadband infrastructure in rural parts of the country. In March 2018, Congress provided \$600 million to the USDA to expand broadband infrastructure and services under the program. – **Associated Press**

There is no coronavirus vaccine available for dogs being withheld from humans. It isn't necessary to close your windows because military helicopters will start spraying disinfectant. And baby-formula manufacturers aren't sending freebies to people who call their customer hotlines.

These are among the viral social-media memes debunked by Lead Stories, a fact-checking site co-founded by Los Angeles entrepreneur Alan Duke. At a moment when there are global scarcities for items as diverse as toilet paper and ventilators, Mr. Duke offers something else in short supply: fact checking.

The former CNN producer's company, Lead Stories, helps [Facebook](#) Inc. and other social-media platforms limit the spread of virus-related misinformation by flagging it as false. Business is booming, thanks to a surge of posts that are both dangerous and harder to track than many other forms of what is known as fake news.

The claims that Lead Stories debunks are then labeled as false on Facebook, which limits their spread and links to Lead Stories' reviews. A staffer combs the platform looking to identify and label duplicates that spring up. Already ramping up with funding from Facebook to combat misinformation in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Mr. Duke and others in the industry have pivoted to coronavirus almost full-time. "We've maxed out all our goals for the month," he said halfway through March, referring to the company's contractual targets for Facebook fact-check volumes. Lead Stories continues to review Facebook and Instagram content, and review material from [Twitter](#), YouTube and other platforms that don't pay it, posting fact checks to its own site. Since its first coronavirus fact check in mid-January, Lead Stories has fact checked more than 200 viral coronavirus claims.

Other fact checkers have become similarly focused, organizing an ad-hoc international task force to identify misinformation that has hopped national borders and languages [as quickly as the virus itself](#). Lead Stories has traditionally battled political publishers and for-profit hoaxers in places ranging from the U.S. to Macedonia and Pakistan. While many coronavirus posts carry international content—the meme warning of military disinfectant drops appeared in Europe and elsewhere—they generally appear to be noncommercial, produced by pranksters or people promoting misguided home remedies, Mr. Duke said.

Such apparently organic content also coexists with ideologically driven falsehoods, such as the claim that "60 Democrats" in the U.S. Senate blocked coronavirus relief payments to Americans. The content is often memes and images rather than purported news stories. And where Lead Stories has become used to complaints from the publishers of stories it rated as false, it now hears from regular users upset that it has debunked a meme they shared. "Sharing this stuff is how people connect to their friends and co-workers," Mr. Duke said. "It's embarrassing when it shows up in their timeline that they shared something that's wrong. That's not something we've been through before with fact checking—this is much more personal."

As is common with Facebook's more than 60 global fact-checking partners, Lead Stories was launched with independent funding but has sustained itself in part with Facebook money. The tech giant started the fact-checking program in late 2016 after criticism of how it handled misinformation during the 2016 presidential race. But human fact

checkers remain central to Facebook's defenses, and even before [the coronavirus pandemic](#) the company was ramping up its investments. Mr. Duke declined to say by how much money Facebook is paying Lead Stories, but said it was a multiple of the \$359,000 it earned under its 2019 contract.

Mr. Duke and his co-founder Maarten Schenk, who works from his home in Belgium, were the company's sole full-time employees until last November, when Facebook told U.S.-based fact-checking partners that it would bankroll a sharp expansion of their work ahead of the 2020 presidential election. "Fighting misinformation isn't something one company can do alone," said Campbell Brown, head of news partnerships at Facebook. "The more the industry is sharing best practices and companies are learning from each other, the better the outcomes will be for people."

The funding let Lead Stories increase hiring. It now has 10 full-time employees and six part-time fact checkers, mostly former CNN employees. Mr. Duke said it pays "on par" with the network's six-figure salaries in some instances. Facebook funds about half of the international publishers and fact-checking organizations that are part of a coronavirus-specific fact-checking alliance coordinated by the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network. "We were here before Facebook started working with us," said Cristina Tardáguila, the IFCN's associate director, of the fact checkers. "But there is no other program like this."

That might change. In January, video-sharing app TikTok said it would begin reviewing user reports of misinformation with a U.S.-based moderation staff, and that it was working with third-party groups. A reporter, editor, producer and special-projects manager at CNN for 26 years, Mr. Duke was doing celebrity-focused profiles and investigations out in Los Angeles when he resigned in 2014. He spent five months working for the National Enquirer's parent company before quitting to co-found Lead Stories.

The work can be rough, Mr. Duke said, with one employee quitting after learning about the frequency that Lead Stories' reporters and editors have received threats from people they fact check. Staffers consult public-health guidance and identify entities with expertise or firsthand knowledge about specific rumors. To debunk the meme about free pandemic-time baby formula, for example, Lead Stories reporters spoke with numerous manufacturers.

The company reviews a tiny fraction of the billions of social-media posts produced each day. It uses a tool built by Mr. Schenk, called Trendolizer, that tracks posts on the cusp of spreading rapidly. Facebook also gives its fact-checking partners a queue of posts that are suspicious or have already been flagged by users. Lead Stories' traffic is up nearly 10-fold, Mr. Duke said, with about 8,000 users reading its reviews at any given time—a number that reflects how Facebook slows the spread of posts that it labels as inaccurate. – **Wall Street Journal**

Comcast Business has been awarded a \$9.3 million 10-year contract by the U.S. Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) to establish commercial Ethernet gateways to provide Ethernet connections to its Defense Information Systems Network (DISN) in the northeastern United States.

In May 2016, the Department of Defense was directed to migrate to Ethernet-based services in an effort to reduce overall telecommunications costs. As a result, the DISN's 17,000 legacy, point-to-point public switched telephone network (PSTN) circuits will be replaced with Ethernet connections. The migration will take place across 12 regions, providing coverage to the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia. Region 1 has been awarded to Comcast Business and covers the northeastern United States.

"This award lets us do our part to support the nation. Transforming DISA's network to an Ethernet-based solution will deliver a performance-based network to DISA and its mission partners," said Ken Folderauer, vice president, Federal Government Sales, Comcast Business. "The U.S. government is one of the largest IT buyers in the world. Only the very best earn their trust, and Comcast Business is honored to be on that short list. We look forward to continuing to build out this incredible partnership with DISA."

Comcast Business will deliver its Ethernet Virtual Private Line (EVPL) service to fulfill DISA's network requirements and provide a flexible Ethernet solution capable of meeting the agency's demands. Comcast Business' EVPL service is designed to improve application performance across a network with a private, point-to-multipoint network design between multiple locations. DISA provides enterprise network and IT infrastructure to support the requirements of the Department of Defense's more than 40 military services, combatant commands and support organizations worldwide. – **Broadband Technology Report**

