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For American consumers, Netflix's value proposition has escalated during the coronavirus pandemic — and the question for the No. 1 subscription streamer is when, not if, it's going to next raise prices. Even amid intensifying competition from Disney Plus, HBO Max, Apple TV Plus and others, Netflix has seen its pricing power grow over the last five months, according to a study published this week by Cowen & Co. analysts led by John Blackledge.

The Wall Street firm's monthly survey of about 2,500 U.S. consumers showed that overall, Netflix customers who said they would be willing to pay more than they currently do rose from 47% in December 2019 to 55% in May 2020. And, among respondents who stream more than 7 hours per week of Netflix content, willingness to pay more rose from 52% to 60% over the same time period. "With COVID-19 taking hold this year, we aren't surprised that [Netflix] would gain pricing power as it becomes a more essential entertainment service, and our survey data supports this thesis," the Cowen analysts wrote.

The analysts don't expect Netflix to raise prices in 2020, but said the company is "well positioned into '21 & beyond." The company's content spending is expected to hit \$15.4 billion (on a cash basis) in 2020, an investment in high-quality TV and movie content across genres that "likely ensures [Netflix] the top spot in the living room over time, in our view," the Cowen team said. Note that the survey data reflects a snapshot in time, and a sputtering U.S. economy and relatively high unemployment could make consumers increasingly price-sensitive.

Washington Post
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New York Times
How Netflix Beat Hollywood to a Generation of Black Content

Philadelphia Inquirer
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Pennlive
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LancasterOnline.com
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Moreover, what people imagine they hypothetically would do (i.e., be willing to pay more for Netflix) doesn't always match actual behavior.

Netflix last [raised prices starting in the first quarter of 2019](#), with its most popular plan — the Standard tier, with two HD streams — rising 18%, from \$10.99 to \$12.99 per month in the U.S. As the price hikes went into effect through Q2 and the back half of the year, Netflix's cancellation rates rose but its revenue growth also accelerated: Full-year 2019 revenue climbed 28%, to \$20.2 billion, outpacing the 20% net subscriber increase.

During the company's Q1 2020 earnings interview for investors, chief product officer Greg Peters said subscriber trends in January-February of this year returned to "pretty much normal pre-price-change churn levels." Netflix netted a [massive 15.8 million new subscriber in the period](#) thanks to the coronavirus, to hit nearly 183 million worldwide. "At this point, we're not even thinking about price increases," Peters said in April. During the COVID-19 crisis, "we just want to stay super-focused... making sure that we're continuing to be there, have a great service, and make sure that we're able to provide entertainment and escape for our members around the world."

Netflix is scheduled to report Q2 results on July 16 after market close. The company projected 7.5 million net additions worldwide for the second quarter, versus 6.8 million in the year-earlier period. As COVID-19 restrictions around the world ease, Netflix said, it expects viewing and the [rate of subscriber growth to decline in the second half of 2020](#). However, with the number of coronavirus cases surging in the U.S. in recent weeks to record levels, extended stay-at-home quarantines could benefit Netflix to the upside going into Q3. -- *Variety*

Big Valley is a living postcard of Pennsylvania. Jet-black buggies hug the shoulders of its long, straight roads and knobby-kneed foals prance in fields so green they look electrified. Most signs there urge motorists to repent and rejoice, or to buy fresh strawberries from the Amish children sitting in the shade.

But one Pennsylvania tradition also plagued residents who live in this sweeping landscape: slow, unreliable, and expensive internet service. The government couldn't help. Private suppliers have long said improved speeds were too costly to provide for such a sparsely populated area. So a group of mostly retirees banded together and took a frontier approach to a modern problem. They built their own wireless network, using radio signals instead of expensive cable. "We just wanted better internet service up our valley. It was pretty simple as that," said Kevin Diven, a founding member of [the Rural Broadband Cooperative](#).

The nonprofit RBC services anyone who can see the 120-foot, former HAM radio tower its founders bought and erected on a patch of land they lease from an Amish man at around 1,900 feet on Stone Mountain, on the border of Mifflin and Huntington Counties, 180 miles from Philadelphia. Users pay an initial set-up fee of about \$300, and monthly costs for the service are approximately \$40 to \$75, depending on the speeds you choose, ranging from 5 to 25 megabits per second. The RBC has just under 40 paying customers. "We love living out here," said customer Helena Kotala, of Jackson Corner, Huntingdon County. "It's just that the internet totally sucked."

A Pennsylvania State University research project conducted in 2018 found that internet speeds in the state were dismal. Counties such as Sullivan and Wyoming in the northeast, along with vast areas in and near the Allegheny National Forest in the northwest, had the slowest speeds. Some were as dismal as 0 to 3 megabits per second, far below the FCC's 25 mbps benchmark for "high speed." A 2016 Federal

Communications Commission report estimated that 39 percent of rural Americans, about 23 million people, had no access to 25 mbps. In Pennsylvania, the number of people without access to high-speed internet is 803,645, about 6 percent of the state's total population. The Philadelphia suburbs had the highest speeds.

The areas of Mifflin and Huntingdon Counties that the RBC serves often had speeds less than 2 mbps, Diven said. He was served by Verizon and said he was frequently in touch with the company about improving speeds. Verizon representatives often attended local meetings about the issue. Comcast, he said, wanted \$80,000 to lay high-speed internet for approximately eight miles. "I tried the FCC and the PUC [Pennsylvania's Public Utility Commission] and got nowhere," said Diven, who had hoped they would intervene with the private providers.

The issue of slow internet speeds isn't something that anyone rages on about, but it's a consistent problem from coast to coast, made even more noticeable during the pandemic. In some parts of Pennsylvania, online learning was not possible for school districts. Kotala, 30, works as the mapping coordinator for the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and has to download large files to her computer daily. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, she left her office in State College and started working from home, where downloads screeched to a halt. After one month of quarantine, she bought into the RBC and loves the service. "I had already gotten rid of Netflix because watching any movie online was a nightmare," she said. "I would have to sit there and wait for stuff to download or upload and just go do something for a while."

The RBC's members did all the work starting in 2017, saving money by divvying up talents and livelihoods. Approximately 25 people kicked in \$60,000 for the project. Some worked in construction, others in engineering. One was a former genomics professor at Penn State, another retired from the U.S Army. Brandon Beck, the RBC's president, was a professional musician in the Tampa Bay area, playing the French horn. They pooled their money to clear the land, buy the tower and equipment, and pour concrete for the bunker that houses the electronics, which includes two banks of batteries used to propel Nissan's electric car, the Leaf. "They were available," Beck said, explaining the batteries.

Power is supplied through solar panels, with a back-up wind generator. The signal went live in 2019. Unlike traditional DSL or satellite-based wireless, the RBC taps into an existing fiber line it turns into a radio signal that bounces off a dish fastened to a three-pump gas station in Allensville. The signal races across Big Valley, then up the mountain past buzzards and ravens. The signal can be bounced off other dishes and relayed to other homes, much like a laser off mirrors. Each home has its own small dish to receive the wireless signal from the tower.

The signal can service a 15-mile-radius. Fixed wireless systems are "line of sight," meaning users have to be able to see the tower from their residences in order to connect. Sometimes, trees block it. "Leaves," Beck said. "Leaves are the enemy." Tom Bracken, an RBC board member, said pines are the worst. "If you're going to try to shoot through pines," Bracken said, "just hang it up and go home." Bracken, retired from the U.S. Army, said fixed wireless systems exist all over the world and rural communities can emulate what the RBC did. "You have to tap into the skills of your community," he said. "You never know who your neighbor is and what they can do." – ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

Union County Commissioners anticipate receiving more than \$4 million in federal coronavirus relief funding and are exploring how to use at least a portion of those funds to expand wireless broadband internet access in the underserved western end of the county. Current commissioners

continue efforts kickstarted by the prior iteration of the board, which budgeted \$200,000 devoted to broadband efforts, according to Commissioner Jeff Reber.

Commissioner Stacy Richards said three studies have been performed on expanding access. That could include the construction of new towers, the installation of equipment on existing state-owned towers or a mix of both, according to information shared by all three commissioners. Internet providers would rent space on the towers and install their own equipment. "We're primarily focused on the western end of the county which is the area that's been primarily underserved," Richards said.

The lack of broadband service was among the reasons Mifflinburg Area offered paper packets for students to pick up, rather than complete lessons online, after schools closed due to the coronavirus outbreak earlier this year. Areas targeted are the Shamokin Mountain near New Berlin and Jones Mountain in Hartley Township, Richards said. One complication is that the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has a moratorium on tower development in the state forest, she said.

To use the CARES funding, Richards said it must be proven that COVID-19 caused specific disruptions in different "sectors." Broadband would qualify, she said, since the internet became ever more crucial for distance learning and business. Other potential uses of the funds include loans or grants for business and nonprofit organization recovery, with Richards noting she supports the latter, as well as behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment, economic development and cost recovery to municipalities for handling the outbreak. The funding could be split up to use for more than one initiative, she said.

Chairman Preston Boop said the board will explore permission to add wireless broadband equipment to existing towers used by state police. He said the board would look to work with Snyder and Northumberland county governments to expand the reach of existing wireless systems. "It may be necessary for schools to function in the fall and businesses to continue to function," Boop said, noting the complications posed by COVID-19 and the possibility of a second wave disrupting the resumption of school in the fall. "I think we should put a significant amount of money towards broadband," Boop said.

Reber said the board's had preliminary discussions with a telecommunications contractor he didn't identify because there is no contract with the firm. According to Reber, the company said it would be feasible to build out existing wireless broadband technology by the end of the year. There's a Dec. 30 deadline to spend the CARES Act funds, the commissioners said. "It has to be aggressive," Reber said of building out the broadband capability, "and if it's going to happen it has to happen soon but it does seem feasible." -- ***Sunbury Daily Item***

