

Our Broadband Experience

A Communications, Marketing,
Member Service and HR
Perspective

Gibson EMC

- About 39,000 members in parts of 8 West Tennessee and 4 West Kentucky counties.
- 97 employees, 6 offices, 3,500 miles of line
- Merged with former Hickman-Fulton Co-op on Jan. 1, 2016.





Our Broadband Background

- Constructed, maintained and operated a middle-mile transport business for 10 years
- Originally connected substations and offices
- TN law restricted providing retail service, but we have served members through third-party providers along our 350-mile fiber route
- \$1.2 million in annual middle-mile income has helped keep our electric rates low





Members Need Access

- Members have been urging us to provide access to high-speed internet service
- Last survey (used Survey Monkey), about 10% of members responded and 92% said they would purchase from us if we offered

2017 Developments

- May - Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Act was passed allowing us to sell retail internet
- June - Gibson EMC board formed a wholly-owned, not-for-profit subsidiary – Gibson Connect, LLC
- October - Launched join.gibsonconnect.com (CrowdFiber site) October 10.
- 27 zones (community and substation based)
- Within just a few days, all 27 zones had registrants






join.gibsonconnect.com

- We wanted members to drive the process
- Takes the politics out and encourages member engagement
- 1 zone hit its goal in Jan. and two more hit their goals in Feb.
- Applied for 3 TN broadband grants and received 1
- Feb. 21 - launched Phase 1 to build out 6 zones
- We have about 5,900 registrants on our site





Comm/Mktg/HR Strategies

- Strategy 1: **Educate/Engage** (members and employees) – Inform and encourage sign-ups
- Strategy 2: **Maximize Connections** (while building in zones)
- Strategy 3: **Deliver Quality Products and a Great Member Experience** (ensure members' devices are connected properly, problems are resolved quickly, and interactions are friendly and professional)





What's Worked Well

- Engaging a consultant for business analysis and planning
- Using CrowdFiber - a participation model for new residential fiber business
- Purchasing a third-party internet company and hiring the owner to expand business customer base along existing fiber route





General Challenges

- Lawsuit from local telecommunications business
- Competitive and cut-throat market
- Even telecommunications businesses in the co-op world seem to be less willing to share info



Communications/Marketing Challenges

- Doing it in-house
- Keeping employees and members informed
- Managing social media and join.gibsonconnect.com comments section
- Managing the member expectations (want internet service now and want us to advertise/market aggressively)



HR Challenges

- Affiliate Membership
- Determining competitive compensation for telecommunications industry
- Increased workload and redistribution of work due to Gibson Connect responsibilities
- Space for new employees
- Preparing employees to provide excellent service





Legacy Project

- Important to the electric co-op to have fiber to the home in preparation for a different energy future
- Important to members that we are responsive to their needs
- Access to high-speed, reliable and affordable internet service will be a game changer for our members and our communities





Contact me if I can help...

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