



Dupont Summit 2017

Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy

December 1, Historic Whittemore House, Washington, DC

Presentation

“How Getting People Online Creates Social and Economic Opportunity: A Case for Digital Inclusion for All”

Imagine spending your high school day doing your homework in the parking lots of fast food restaurants. Imagine taking college level math courses on a smartphone in the parking lot of a local hospital, surrounded by other students doing the same. Imagine having to spend hours in the local library, applying for jobs in 45 minute increments, hoping that you don't miss a job offering email that could change your life.

These are the stories for more than 75 million people in America who live on the wrong side of the digital divide, [according to the American Community Survey](#). The divide cuts across all demographics and geographies, but has a strong hold amongst minority and low-income populations. These are the 75 million people who cannot access the indispensable parts of American life that have migrated online like education and employment. They are also 75 million potential consumers that our digital economy cannot reach or monetize.

At EveryoneOn, we believe that at-home internet service is no longer a luxury and that by connecting people to the internet we create social and economic opportunity for all of us.

Five Lessons Learned

Since 2012, we have connected more than 500,000 people across 48 states. Our goal is to connect one million people in United States by 2020. We call this the digital inclusion tipping point and we believe that it will tip the scales on the digital divide, effectively changing the course of those currently being left behind. Since our founding, we have learned five key lessons that guide our work every day:

Cost is King: According to research from [Pew Research Center](#) and from the [Joan Ganz Cooney Center and Rutgers University](#), the overwhelming and prime barrier to families getting online is cost. While it is important to deal with other barriers like lack of awareness or cumbersome sign-up processes, we will never close the digital divide in the United States unless there are affordable quality at-home internet options for everyone in this country.

Process is Paramount: While cost is the largest barrier, we find that the next largest barrier is one of process. Currently, accessing affordable internet options is far more cumbersome and difficult than it

has it to be. How can we do this better? The answer lies in an example practice from different space entirely: the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Just like Motor-Voter practices, what if we took all the common touchpoints that low-income people in the United States have like visits to clinics, applying for social benefits, applying for a library card, recertifying their eligibility to live in HUD-housing, among others and used these as opportunities to ask the unconnected if they wanted internet service and created streamlined ways for them to sign-up? We must remember that the unconnected are not victims but consumers, and we need to treat them as such if we are going to close the digital divide.

Internet is Necessary but Insufficient: We describe our work as “digital inclusion” and we say that it is a three-legged stool of which providing internet service is a critical leg. However, there are two others. The second is the availability of low-cost computers and tablets (which we will call “devices”) and the third is digital literacy training. As we have grown in our work, we have dedicated ourselves to shoring up these legs of the stool to ensure true digital inclusion for all.

No Field of Dreams: In the classic movie, “Field of Dreams,” Kevin Costner builds a baseball park in the middle of nowhere that ends up being a success because he hears a voice saying, “build it and they will come.” While this is a beautiful sentiment for Hollywood, in digital inclusion, it simply does not work. One cannot simply create affordable internet service options and assume that people will find them effortlessly. What we have learned about the unconnected is that they are people on the wrong side of many other issues in this society, including juggling multiple jobs and challenges. We cannot expect them to come to us to access something as critical as the internet. We have to go to them.

Connectivity is the Journey not the Destination: As we worked across the country, one thing that we have seen is that very few of the people we connected simply are interested in the internet for its own sake. They tell us they want to be connected so that their kids can do their homework, or so that they can apply for a job or take advantage of online classes, or be able to have their grandparents skype with their grandkids. The internet is a means to an end that is different for every person and community. We must understand those ends if we are to be successful in this work of creating a digital economy that includes everyone. Somewhere in the United States, there is young man or woman living in a tough circumstance who could be the next Sheryl Sandberg or Barack Obama. We must not let the lack of a \$10 per month internet connection stand in the way of finding them.

Speaker

Chike Aguh, CEO, EveryoneOn