

Internet: The New Utility

The planning team at Broadacre Communications, a subsidiary of Broadacre Management Company, had accepted what seemed at first glance to be a relatively straightforward challenge: provide low-cost, high-speed Internet connectivity to the tenants of a 505-unit luxury building on Chicago's downtown lakefront. The challenge, it turned out, could not be met by conventional means. The Broadacre team's research discovered that cable modem and DSL, the most common methods of broadband connectivity to the individual consumer, are both expensive and fraught with headaches. Lengthy installation delays, outrageous hold times for technical support, unreliable performance (particularly during peak usage times) and security concerns are just the tip of the iceberg -- all for prices that are anything but rock-bottom. After careful consideration, it became clear that in order to overcome these problems, Broadacre would have to look farther afield for a technically creative solution.

onShore responded with a solution previously unheard of in the Chicago area: a LAN-based, cost-sharing technology strategy that lit up each individual tenant at North Pier Tower for high-speed Internet access while simultaneously creating a networked, virtual community internal to the building. With Internet access at speeds of 1.6MB downstream, many tenants were suddenly enjoying faster connections at home than at their place of work for a small monthly subscription fee.

Besides their Internet connect, North Pier tenants sit on an even faster 10BaseT Ethernet intra-building network. With high-speed unit accessibility, a seasoned systems integrator such as onShore can offer a wide array of a-la-carte services to the individual tenant: remote and secure data backup, business class security and access to genuine Systems Integration Consultants for technical support. New broadband services such as Voice-Over-IP telephones and on-demand music and video are in development at onShore and are expected to be available to North Pier Tenants before the first of the year. onShore's technology expertise puts Broadacre in the unique position of being able to deploy new network services to North Pier Tower without having to wait for Internet connectivity to catch up.

The benefit of onShore's unique network solution reaches beyond North Pier Tower's tenants. Equally significant is the way this service has distinguished North Pier Tower and its management company, Broadacre, from their competitors in Chicago's hot real estate market. While buildings struggle to differentiate themselves in a market that has resulted in a 96% occupancy rate in many high-rises, Broadacre Communications is the first on the block to offer Internet and data services as if they were any other essential utility or amenity.

The value added at North Pier Tower isn't limited to the intangible. Typically, building management companies have simply allowed DSL and cable vendors to offer an inherently inferior technology and keep virtually all of the profits. At North Pier Tower, a unique network design that capitalizes on onShore's mastery of LINUX-based server applications and leverages onShore's strategic partnership with hardware titan Cisco Systems allows Broadacre Management to keep the lion's share of user subscription fees. The return on Broadacre's investment will come more quickly than initially was expected, over twenty percent of the existing tenants subscribed to the service within the first two months.

The project at North Pier Tower is an ongoing one. Even after all the users have signed up, only onShore has the Systems Integration team capable of supporting the subscribers at North Pier Tower as well as the intricate, switched network that connects them.