

## Google wants a pilot project; why not here?

Staff Reports

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Google, the Internet search giant, wants to roll out an experimental fiber-optic network that would give the community where it's built faster Internet service than most users can imagine - 1 gigabit per second, about a thousand times faster than standard home DSL service in Redding.

We want Google to do it here.

In announcing the pilot project on its Web site, Google suggested some of the possible uses of moving that much data that quickly: "Imagine sitting in a rural health clinic, streaming three-dimensional medical imaging over the Web, and discussing a unique condition with a specialist in New York. Or downloading a high-definition, full-length feature film in less than five minutes. Or collaborating with classmates around the world while watching live 3D video of a university lecture."

Yeah, we could live with that.

What the north state cannot live with, at least not prosperously, is continuing to be a digital backwater as data-intensive industries drive the American economy's future growth.

Scott Putnam is head of Apex Technology Management Inc. and an avid booster of having Redding vie for the Google project. He calls it a very long shot - but it's even longer if the city doesn't try.

In a presentation Friday to the Shasta Technology Association, Putnam outlined the need for a far more robust Internet service - whoever supplies it. The trend in computing, he explained, is toward "the cloud." Rather than buying computers powerful enough for the most intensive use and stocking them with software that might only rarely be booted up, businesses are increasingly using Web-based services - sharing the processing power of massive "server farms" and paying for software only as needed. It's the future, he thinks, and we'd better start preparing for it. And that means overcoming the bottleneck of second-rate local Internet connectivity.

But forget about tomorrow's technology. Already, he and other speakers at Friday's meeting said, computing-intensive businesses already face a real disadvantage in Redding.

"In the big cities, it's not unheard of to get 100 - even 1,000 - megabits per second for a small business," Putnam said. "In Redding, it's incredibly cost-prohibitive."

Business-grade data connections, he estimated, cost 10 to 20 times more here than

in California's major cities. Almost every other business expense in the north state is relatively low, by California standards, but the bandwidth gap is stark. And that alone can be a deal-breaker for Web-dependent companies.

The city of Redding is already on board with the idea and preparing an application to submit before the March 26 deadline, but Google also welcomes nominations from residents and community groups. To lend your voice, go to [www.google.com/appserve/fiberrfi](http://www.google.com/appserve/fiberrfi) and click "Get Involved." We probably can't crash Google's mighty servers with a swell of clicks from Redding, but we could try.

And even if this particular project goes nowhere - let's be honest, the odds are comparable to a lightning strike - it's past time for a little agitation. Local government, chambers of commerce, the Economic Development Corp. and, especially, businesses that understand where the Redding area comes up short need to start organizing to ensure the future doesn't happen elsewhere.

Private companies naturally focus on cities with large customer bases, but there is help for rural areas.

The state, through the California Emerging Technology Fund, has resources to close the "digital divide." So does the federal government, which authorized \$7.2 billion through the stimulus bill to expand broadband access in underserved communities.

If we don't grab those opportunities, we'll have only ourselves to blame when we remain unplugged from tomorrow's economy.

