

High-Speed Internet: A Game-Changer for Vermilion

By Randy Martin, President, Rock Solid Nitrogen Services Ltd.

Big news: Vermilion is on the verge of getting high-speed internet.

If someone read that in Calgary or Edmonton, they might think they'd accidentally stumbled on an article from fifteen years ago. But this is definitely 2022. It's very hard for those who live in major centres to imagine that there are places that still don't have broadband internet access; it's become an absolute necessity and seems to be available everywhere you go. But the truth is that many small towns across Canada continue to have poor connectivity, even though high speed is just as much a necessity for us as it is for everyone else.

I was thrilled when I learned that Vermilion's administration has been working hard to bring high-speed internet to our town. This initiative will be a game-changer for area businesses—helping us keep pace with our competitors and retain our employees. It will also attract new businesses and families to the town, keeping Vermilion thriving.

How Slow Internet Access Holds Us Back

My company has been doing business for twenty-four years, providing coil tubing, nitrogen pumping as well as picker and heavy haul services to the oil and gas industry. We have over eighty employees, and we're located in the heart of Vermilion's industrial centre. Our lack of access to high-speed internet is not only frustrating, but inefficient and actually detrimental to our business.

Other business owners are all too familiar with these issues, of course. Let's look at just a few examples of how slow internet speed makes doing business extremely difficult—not just for my business but for many others just like us.

- **It costs us money:** It takes people longer to do their work, so we need to hire more people to do the same tasks. We've even lost contracts because of our slow connectivity.
- **It makes virtual meetings extremely inefficient:** Like many other companies these days, we use Zoom quite a lot to communicate... or we try to, but our connection regularly hangs up or lags. This affects our internal operations but also our client calls, which does not reflect well on us.
- **It makes our systems run incredibly slowly:** Our employees have taken to going on coffee breaks while they wait for the system to let them log in, and at least twice a week, we have to unplug and reset our office's internet because it has frozen. As a result, it can often take up to *three days* to transfer our entire set of books to our accountant at the end of the year.
- **It makes training take twice as long as it should:** Two-thirds of our new-employee orientation is done online, and the biggest complaint we get is about the internet freezing or crashing in the middle. The training process takes two days when it could easily only take one. We've even sent people to do their training from home, if they live somewhere that has better connectivity.

- **It prevents us from properly using the modern technology that our clients demand:** More and more, our clients expect us to have automated processes, remote-fix capability and real-time data collection. We have the systems but often our connection quality and speed prevent us from using them efficiently and effectively.

High-Speed Internet Will Transform My Business

High-speed internet will address every single one of those issues, finally bringing Vermilion up to pace with larger centres in Western Canada. We'll be able to provide real-time data collection and fix issues remotely, giving our customers further confidence that we're addressing their needs. We'll be able to adopt real-time billing, which we could never do before due to connectivity issues, cutting down on administrative costs and increasing efficiency.

People today rely on their phones for *everything*; most can't imagine working somewhere that doesn't have good internet connection. Having high speed internet access will be a huge help in attracting and retaining employees to our company.

Huge Benefits for the Whole Community

Knowing all of these issues are resolved will bring more businesses to Vermilion's industrial area, something we've all been working at and hoping for.

And it's not just the business realm that will benefit. High-speed internet access will also bring new families to the area, and make people who moved away for university or college more likely to move back. Internet is a critical part of people's daily lives and it's only getting more so; it's non-negotiable for people looking to make a home somewhere.

All in all, this is a *massive* change that will help us grow across all aspects of our community. I couldn't be more excited for what's to come.