

O-Net is immediate boon for business

Fibre optic service giving access to new markets

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O-Net is up and running and businesses could not be happier.

The new fibre optic service provider is earning early rave reviews for its speed and accessibility to markets deemed impossible just a few months ago.

"It's amazing," said Monte Hindbo, owner of Olds Iron Works and Spearhead Design. "We are doing giant laser scans of three gigabytes and we need to transfer that data to companies around the world.

"Our geographic information systems guy sent one file and it took 31 seconds to upload," he added. "Before, it was impossible. It would take up to 12 hours."

Hindbo, whose businesses are cutting-edge companies in the fields of design and fabricated steel and iron, said O-Net has moved past traditional Internet service providers and opened up a "whole new avenue" for companies wanting to expand their business.

"It has given us a whole new marketplace for us. Instead of uploading one file every 12 hours we can do 50 files in two hours," he said, adding the service has a "whole list" of advantages. "It opens up a whole new access to new technology. We have access to cloud-based servers. We don't need to upgrade servers. We can have data stored on servers throughout the world, with all having extra security and backup."

Best of all, he added, the O-Net fibre optic technology will allow his companies to stay in Olds.

"In the past others have had to leave," said Hindbo, who has 35 employees. "It will definitely excel our business but it will allow us to stay here. This is quite an innovation for Olds."

O-Net was initiated eight and a half years ago by the non-profit Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development. It is a partnership between the province, which provided \$3.5 million in grant funds, and the Town of Olds, which loaned the institute \$6 million.

Stirling McLeod, an O-Net director and financial coordinator for the institute's technology committee, said the goal was always to create a service for the region's business community, along with residential users, to have a world-class communications system.

"Without this initiative we would continue to fall behind the large urban centres, and businesses like Spearhead Design and Olds Iron Works would have to consider moving to major urban centres to perform the work they are doing."

McLeod said O-Net filled a need when no traditional service provider was interested in moving to the fibre optic level.

"We tried to convince them," said McLeod.

"We did this (O-Net) to ensure our businesses were on a level playing field with everyone else in the province and nation. It wouldn't happen without the fibre optic network."

In the meantime, businesses such as Olds Iron Works are finding the cost for the new service is about the same as the previous traditional service provider.

"It is the same cost for a whole lot more service," said McLeod, adding about 60 per cent of the community – business and residential – should have their installations completed by the end of the year. "This network is owned by the community and will prosper with the support of the community. It is a win, win and win situation for everyone involved."

For more information on O-Net visit www.o-net.ca.