

Comcast Launches Customer Service Program for the Deaf Community in American Sign Language
Tuesday, December 03, 2019 03:30:00 PM (GMT)

Comcast Announces Partnership With Connect Direct, A Subsidiary of Communication Service for the Deaf, to Help Close the Digital Divide

Since 2011, Comcast's Internet Essentials Program Has Connected More than 8 Million Low-Income Americans to the Internet

Comcast and Connect Direct, a subsidiary of Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), today launched customer service support via American Sign Language (ASL) for Internet Essentials, Xfinity Internet, and general Xfinity billing questions, called ASL Now. With the combined expertise of both companies, Internet Essentials and Xfinity customers can now connect with customer service agents in their native language, ASL – the fourth most-used language in the United States. This is a first for the cable industry and it helps to further address the digital divide for Americans with disabilities by ensuring that members of the deaf community can get connected to the Internet at home without barriers.

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Comcast and Connect Direct today launched a customer service program for the deaf community in American Sign Language, called ASL Now. (Photo: Business Wire)

The announcement was made at a digital inclusion rally at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD) to celebrate Comcast's [Internet Essentials](#) program, which is the nation's largest, most comprehensive, and most successful Internet adoption program for low-income households. The launch of [ASL Comcast customer support](#) is a continuation of Comcast's commitment to the disability community. It follows on the heels

of the largest eligibility expansion in the history of the Internet Essentials program, announced earlier this year, to include all qualified low-income households, including people with disabilities.

According to Pew Research Center, the need to address the digital divide for people with disabilities is clear. The study found that 23 percent of people with disabilities say they never go online, and 57 percent say they do not even have a home broadband subscription.

"The Internet is an incredible resource so long as you have the skills and the tools to use it," said David L. Cohen, Senior Executive Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Comcast Corporation. "By partnering with Connect Direct and working with the deaf community, we want to address and break down the barriers to broadband adoption that are unique to this population. That starts by being able to speak with customers in their native language."

"We are especially happy to partner with Comcast on this initiative, which represents a significant leap forward in broadening the reach of services available in ASL and creating more avenues for fuller participation of deaf people in society," said Christopher Soukup, Chief Executive Officer of CSD.

“Comcast’s commitment to launching an ASL customer service center underlines a shift in attitude by major corporations in recognizing the value of deaf people and the benefit and ease in delivering exceptional customer service through their customers’ language of choice.”

In line with Comcast’s commitment to make products, services, and experiences accessible to the widest possible audience including people with disabilities, Comcast also announced today that it created an internetessentials.com/accessibility landing page, with direct links to the new ASL Now chat function, the ability to order collateral materials in Braille and large print, and an accessibility-specific FAQ. Additionally, the Learning Center on the Internet Essentials website now includes nearly 50 Internet safety and digital literacy videos with closed captions for the deaf. Topics include: online safety and security, basic uses of the Internet, and how to get various things done online. The website is also operable with assistive technologies, such as screen reader software, for the blind or visually impaired. Earlier this year, Comcast announced a partnership with the [American Association of People with Disabilities](http://www.aad.org) and, working together, the two organizations will continue to add even more digital literacy training content to the Learning Portal that will be specifically designed for people with disabilities.

At PSD, Comcast also surprised 90 students by giving them free tablets and six months of complimentary Internet service at home through the Internet Essentials program. Additionally, in partnership with Dell Technologies, the Company announced it will donate new computer equipment to PSD for students to learn vital digital skills.

At a second event at the Nationalities Services Center (NSC), Comcast announced the grand opening of NSC’s new computer lab. Funded in part by a Comcast Foundation grant, the lab will become part of the City of Philadelphia’s KEYSLOT network of public, private, and nonprofit organizations that provide technology, training, and other opportunities through community-based public access centers computing labs. Additionally, a second accelerator grant was announced to fund increased instructor hours and provide for a wider range of classes, including basic word processing and office productivity. At that event, Comcast surprised 75 clients of NSC’s employment programs with free laptop computers and six months of complimentary Internet service at home.

“We in local government have a critical role to play in increasing opportunities and improving equitable outcomes for all Philadelphians,” said Mayor Jim Kenney. “Promoting digital inclusion and literacy, along with job readiness to support immigrants and refugees who are building their careers and foundations in our city, is key to realizing the goals outlined in our workforce development and inclusive growth strategies. I applaud Comcast Foundation and Nationalities Service Center for adding this new computer lab to our citywide KEYSLOT network.”

Since 2011, the Internet Essentials program has connected more than eight million low-income Americans to the Internet at home, 90 percent of whom were not connected to the Internet at home until they signed up through Internet Essentials. This number includes nearly 290,000 in the City of Philadelphia.

Internet Essentials has an integrated, wrap-around design that addresses each of the three major barriers to broadband adoption that research has identified. These include: a lack of digital literacy skills, lack of awareness of the relevance of the Internet to everyday life needs, and fear of the Internet; the lack of a computer; and cost of internet service. The program is structured as a partnership between Comcast and tens of thousands of school districts, libraries, elected officials, and nonprofit community partners. For more information, or to apply for the program, please visit www.internetessentials.com. The accessible website can be read in seven different languages and there is also a dedicated phone number 1-855-846-8376. Information about the new ASL website can be found at www.internetessentials.com/accessibility. Spanish-only speakers can call 1-855-765-6995.

About Connect Direct & CSD

Connect Direct, a division of CSD, is leading business and technology solutions for contact center programs, specifically geared for deaf and hard of hearing consumers, while creating employment opportunities for the deaf community. Connect Direct benefits include: custom technology solutions developed by and for the deaf community; overall improved customer service and efficiencies for existing and potential deaf and hard of hearing customers; the elimination of third-party services creating increased and more accurate brand representation; the recruitment, hiring and training of deaf talent to provide direct ASL service; and increased productivity with the decrease of call times by as much as 42 percent.

Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD) is the largest deaf-led social impact organization in the world. For more than four decades, CSD has been a leader in creating and providing accessible technology solutions for the deaf community. Today, CSD continues its work to create opportunities for personal and economic growth within the deaf community, specifically addressing leadership and employment. CSD's Social Venture Fund is one of the first angel funds and incubators in the world supporting deaf entrepreneurs and deaf-owned and operated businesses. For more information about CSD and Connect Direct please visit www.csd.org and www.csd.org/whatwedo/connect-direct/

About Comcast Corporation

Comcast Corporation (Nasdaq: CMCSA) is a global media and technology company with three primary businesses: Comcast Cable, NBCUniversal, and Sky. Comcast Cable is one of the United States' largest video, high-speed Internet, and phone providers to residential customers under the Xfinity brand, and also provides these services to businesses. It also provides wireless and security and automation services to residential customers under the Xfinity brand. NBCUniversal is global and operates news, entertainment and sports cable networks, the NBC and Telemundo broadcast networks, television production operations, television station groups, Universal Pictures, and Universal Parks and Resorts. Sky is one of Europe's leading media and entertainment companies, connecting customers to a broad range of video content through its pay television services. It also provides communications services, including residential high-speed Internet, phone, and wireless services. Sky operates the Sky News broadcast network and sports and entertainment networks, produces original content, and has exclusive content rights. Visit www.comcastcorporation.com for more information.

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Languages: English

Primary Identifiers: CMCSA-US

Related Identifiers: CMCSA-US, US20030N101

Source: Comcast Corporation

Subjects: Photo/Multimedia, Product/Service