# Non-Profit Public Access Network Services (PANS) and Local Internet Service Providers (ISPs): Complement or Conflict?

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## Extended Abstract

This paper examines emerging relationships between community networks and small IP service businesses operating in the same local markets. What are the inherent conflicts between small IP service businesses and community networks, and opportunitites for synergy and mutual economic benefit? The paper will expand on a perspective that small IP businesses and community networks complement their best services to communities by differentiating between access and content roles, and the community network's unique role in working with the traditionally underserved.

In certain geographic areas, the community network as internet on-ramp can be consistent with a non-profit mission and indeed can create a market climate to attract a small IP business. However, community networks tend not to view their operations as strictly low-cost onramps to the Internet, despite the fact that for many thousands of registered users, this is primarily how they are used.

Internet access is an attractive feature to community network users and helps build an account base for civic applications of local interest. However, managing internet services such as electronic mail is a substantial resource drain on a community network operation, a service that a small IP business may be in a much better position to provide. Maintaining and increasing the size of modem pools and access lines is a major capital investment for a community network, and again a service element that a small IP business may be in a much better position to provide.

A community network with only a few thousand active users represents a potential lost market share of several millions of dollars a year to a small IP provider in the same location. The community network operation is not realizing these revenues, thus the local economy does not directly benefit. However, for the underserved, for low income families with children, for displaced workers and other classes of users that could be qualified as "information have nots", the small IP business will not likely provide effective service. Here, the community network is better positioned to provide a basket of access, training and support services that help narrow gaps between information haves and have nots.

Case studies will compare and contrast older urban community network models such as CapAccess in Washington, DC and others maintaining large modem pools and electronic mail services with new models such as LibertyNet in Philadelphia that would not provide direct dialup access but leave that function to commercial IP services.