

Answering the demand for reliable internet in rural Pennsylvania

Together, Indigo Wireless and Xtreme Enterprises bring a 30-year history of caring for their customers.

While Xtreme Enterprises is on the cutting edge of technology, they've also managed to stay true to their original vision of treating their employees like family, listening to the people in the communities they serve and helping rural customers enjoy the same technology as their urban counterparts. "Regional Connect Magazine" caught up with Dave Tews, the president of Xtreme Enterprises, to learn more about their efforts.

Q: What are some ways you and Ericsson are making a difference?

A: Xtreme, along with Ericsson, is at the center of solving the issue of bringing broadband to rural America. We've been working to help distribute Ericsson products to many smaller wireless internet service providers (WISPs) that have struggled for years with a variety of different vendors that have fallen short on their promises.

WISPs in general, but specifically those that we engage with, are on the front lines of the fight to bring high-speed broadband to the most remote parts of America. They spend every day trying to solve the same problem that our industry is trying to solve: providing a higher quality, reliable internet service to the unserved and underserved customers in our service areas. Through our partnership with Ericsson, we're providing these WISPs access to that channel and giving them

an opportunity to deploy Ericsson products in their markets.

We know through experience that those products will grant them much greater longevity and far better reliability in their network; something they haven't had in the past. All that adds up to one thing: improved total cost of ownership. When we demonstrate the true total cost of ownership when deploying Ericsson equipment, our customers can easily calculate how that value translates into their bottom line.

We've worked closely with the Ericsson team and WISPs around the country. We have new customers coming to us every week looking for more information and trying to find out how they can put Ericsson into their networks. Currently, we have many trials in progress around the country with WISPs that are deploying their first Ericsson products. We look forward to deploying many more Ericsson products through our partnership.

Q: Take us back to how Xtreme Enterprises started.

A: Xtreme started in 2015. It was actually an offshoot of our original cellular business, Indigo Wireless, which we began in 1992. We've been a regional cellular carrier for close to 30 years. We entered into the fixed wireless business in 2014. And in 2015 we established

the new company, Xtreme Enterprises, to grow the fixed wireless aspect of our business separately from the cellular business. But we still work closely together. Many employees cross over between the two companies.

As for why we began, that was because we saw a need for fixed wireless. One of our technical staff said, "Hey, we're putting in additional backhaul to accommodate future LTE and 5G services. We should probably use some of that for some fixed wireless as well." I said, "Great idea. Give me a budget." And that's how it started.

Q: What are the core values on which your company was built? Are they different from what Indigo was built on?

A: Well, I think they're both the same. Honestly, the core values have included being part of – and serving – our community. We really listen to what people in the community say. Many times, throughout our growth as Indigo and as Xtreme, we've followed the needs of the people. Our decisions regarding where we grow and how we grow aren't always 100 percent financially driven. Sometimes they're based on the needs of the community. That is our core value – helping the community that we live in and the people who we serve. That's what



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we’re here for. And I think everybody in our company understands that. We don’t look at it as a job. We look at it as an obligation to serve the community that we’re in. We value the fact that our customers appreciate us, and we do what we can for them.

Q: Has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced your company and what are you doing for your community?

A: We’re an essential business, so we’re still out there working as hard as we can to solve the problem of ensuring all students have access to adequate internet service. We’ve been working with our local communities and school districts in Pennsylvania. They identified a list of students who they considered to have inadequate internet. We’re doing everything we can to solve that, and we’re counting on Ericsson to help us.

Q: Tell us something about your company that most people might not know.

A: Well, I think that people who know us as Xtreme don’t necessarily know the story of Indigo behind Xtreme. And the fact that we’ve been here almost 30 years. Because of that, my average employee has been here somewhere between 15 and 20 years. I think it says a lot about our company that we provide a good place to work. Many small businesses say this, but it’s really true for us – we’re a family. And I think the people outside of Xtreme and Indigo don’t know that. For example, when we have our company holiday party, we have it in my home because we really do see our whole company as a family.

Q: How else have you partnered with Ericsson?

A: The fact that we’re working together with Ericsson as a strategic partner to serve the WISP community is something that I’m very proud of.

We’ve been able to offer Ericsson products to small wireless internet providers across the country. We’re actually bringing a quality product to smaller companies and smaller communities that otherwise wouldn’t have a carrier-grade quality product. I’m quite proud of the fact that we’ve been able to accomplish this in conjunction with Ericsson.

Q: What are the opportunities around 5G?

A: I think the opportunity is being able to serve more people with higher speeds. The need for data is endless; the demand is just insatiable. We keep providing more, and whatever we can put out there, customers will use. The opportunity to provide even better service to our customers is what makes me excited about 5G. I think that’s going to be well-received in new places. I’ve been in the industry a long time, so I’ve been through all of the Gs. I’m not nervous about moving to the next one. They are all a challenge. There’s something new to learn every time we do it. I’m excited for it.

Q: What are the primary areas you serve and how does that compare to when you began with Indigo?

A: Indigo serves a broader area. We’re still building our fixed wireless network, but I anticipate that within the next few years, we’ll have a complete overlay between the two networks. The area we serve is north central rural Pennsylvania. It’s a 5,000-square-mile area with a population of about 200,000 people. That’s an average of about 40 people per square mile, so it is definitely rural America. Throughout that 5,000 square miles, there are many pockets of towns with maybe 3,000 or 4,000 people in one area. We also serve very small towns with populations of 300. It’s too expensive to take fiber and run it for miles just to hit one town on top of

a mountain. That’s where we come in. We’re able to serve those people with wireless.

Q: What types of businesses are you serving in that area?

A: There are a lot of farms. But there are also second homes and retirees. It’s a very outdoorsy community with hunting, fishing and camping. We have neighboring larger towns such as Corning, Williamsport and Scranton. Many people will commute to work in those towns. There’s not really any single large industry in our area; healthcare and education are the two biggest areas of employment. We have a few small colleges and hospitals; they tend to be our largest enterprise customers.

Q: What is your favorite aspect about serving this community?

A: It’s the gratefulness of our customers. Over the past 30 years as we’ve grown our network, both cellular and internet, people really do thank us. They send us notes, call us on the phone and stop in our office just to thank us for doing what we’re doing. They’ll thank us for bringing internet to a new town. When we’re constructing sites, we’ve had people shout to the workers on the tower, saying thank you and clapping for us. It’s very rural so we are sometimes behind many of the more metropolitan areas in terms of technology. As we roll this technology out, people are extremely grateful for the work we do and that’s a great feeling.

