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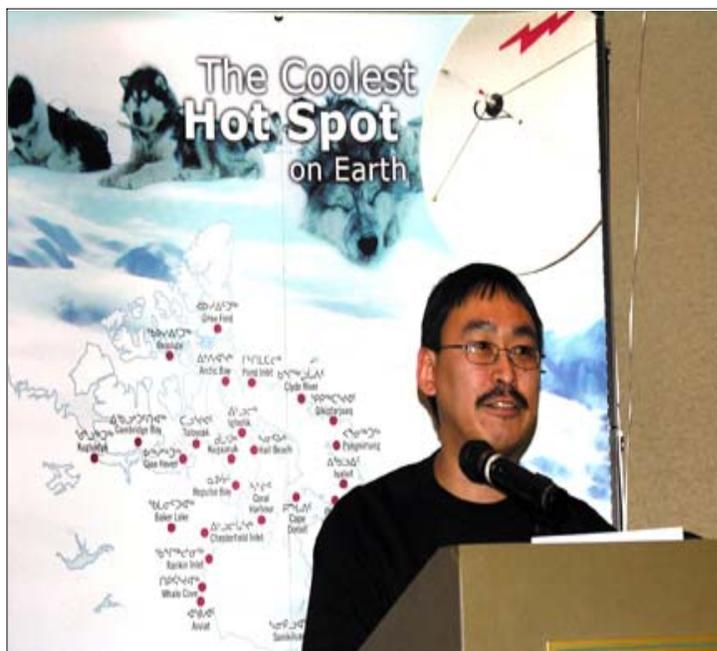
March 30, 2007

Qiniq ready to surf the next level

Wildly popular service needs more bandwidth

JIM BELL

The Nunavut Broadband Development Corp. owns one of the best systems ever built for providing internet access to a remote area - and now they want to take their wildly popular Qiniq network to the next level.



Darrell Ohokannoak, chair of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp., says the Qiniq network has attracted more than 3,000 subscribers since May, 2005. That represents about 35 per cent of Nunavut households and businesses - way more users than backers expected.

(PHOTOS BY JIM BELL)

But they need more bandwidth to feed the growing legion of subscribers across Nunavut who want true high-speed access to the internet and the audio-visual communication tools that work on it.

With the help of a \$50,000 donation from the Nunasi Corp., the broadband corporation took this message to Iqaluit on March 23. They held a demonstration day at the Frobisher Inn to show off their new offerings: an internet phone service called "digital voice" and a multi-point videoconferencing system that's tailor-made for the Qiniq satellite network.

Those are the kinds of electronic tools that Inuit want from the internet, because they create face-to-face oral communication over vast distances.

But to handle all this, Qiniq needs more bandwidth. Right now, the electronic

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data-streams that move Qiniq's internet traffic between each community and Telesat Canada's satellite are barely wide enough to handle current demand.

That's because the Qiniq service became more popular, more quickly, than its backers ever imagined.

When Qiniq started up less than two years ago, in May of 2005, the broadband corporation expected to attract about 2,000 subscribers. The all-important bandwidth subsidy that the corporation receives from Industry Canada's National Satellite Initiative is based on that number.



Linda Haulli of Hall Beach and Darrell Ohokannoak of Cambridge Bay, who is also the chair of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp. and manager of the Kitikmeot's Polarnet service, work as community service providers for Qiniq. Commissions earned by Qiniq's community service providers add about \$1 million a year to local economies.

But at the Iqaluit presentation, Darrell Ohokannoak, the chair of the development corporation's board, told participants that Qiniq's subscriber numbers now exceed 3,000.

That means about 35 per cent of households and businesses in Nunavut now use Qiniq to connect their computers and other devices to the internet.

They're also using the internet a lot more than expected.

"Even routine sites like Royal Bank and The Northern Stores web sites contain lots of graphics and pictures that consume bandwidth. All this means that we need more satellite bandwidth," Qiniq says on its web site.

But the extra bandwidth those subscribers need for what they're doing now, plus what they'll need for future applications such as videoconferencing and internet phone, will cost a lot of money.

That's because all telecommunications in Nunavut move from one place to another via satellite - and that's expensive. The cost of moving one gigabyte of data over a satellite network is 100 times more expensive than moving the same amount of information over a land-based fibre-optic cable.

"Our biggest single cost is the satellite bill," Ohokannoak said.

Qiniq also charges its customers a subsidized monthly rate. Basic service through Qiniq's wireless modems costs the customer \$60 a month.

But the real cost per subscriber is about \$150 month.

To justify its desire for more bandwidth, the development corporation wants to do a new needs study, Ohokannoak said, and they want Nunavummiut to help them put it together. This needs study would likely be used to back up another application to the National Satellite Initiative.

"We want to hear from every person who needs more access," he said.



Jennifer Horton of SSI Micro and Neil Burgess of Qiniq demonstrate a new application that the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp. wants to offer over its Qiniq network: multi-point video-conferencing. Other new services include digital voice and wireless hotspots at hotels, restaurants and airports.

Since its start-up in 2005, the Qiniq network has been widely admired as a model for extending internet access to remote areas. In 2006, the Qiniq network was named by the Intelligent Community forum as one of the top 21 "smart communities" in the world that year.

And in 2005, the Conference Board of Canada said that the \$10 million that it cost to build Qiniq may turn out to be the best infrastructure investment that Nunavut has ever made.

Their new offerings, which were on display in Iqaluit last week, include the following:

- Digital Voice: an internet phone service that would be used either to make phone calls over the internet to other Qiniq users, or to any telephone in the world. The corporation is still working on pricing for this service.
- Click to Meet: a multi-point videoconferencing service that allows users to communicate with real-time audio and video in a single satellite hop, using software written for Qiniq.
- Community Hotspots: 802.11b/g wireless access for laptop users in restaurants, hotels, airports and other public places.

The Nunavut Broadband Corp., formed in 2002, is a not-for-profit corporation run by a volunteer board. It now has more than 200 members.

After several years of planning and lobbying, the corporation began building the Qiniq network in 2004, with financing contributed by a long list of government agencies and Inuit organizations, including Industry Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Atuqtuarvik Corp., Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and the Government of Nunavut.

Their network was built by SSI Micro, the well-known internet services firm in Yellowknife. SSI Micro continues to run Qiniq through a system community service providers, or "CSPs," based in each of Nunavut's 25 communities.

In some places the CSP is a company such as Polarnet or Nunanet, and in other places the CSP may be an individual.

For information on Qiniq, go to www.qiniq.com. For more information on the broadband corporation, go to www.nunavut-broadband.ca.

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