

# NetSet Communications

*Bridging the Digital Divide*

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In this day and age, there is little room to argue that high-speed Internet access has become the lifeblood of the modern world. This technology weaves a global fabric together with the simple click of a mouse or the tap of a screen and then, just as instantaneously, serves it up for societal observation, interpretation and participation. What was once a technological luxury reserved for those living in the heart of the urban jungle or meeting in metropolitan corporate boardrooms has now become the core communication vehicle by which the general population is informed, entertained and connected. And thanks to what its company CEO, Charlie Clark, describes as an “insatiable desire” for such connectivity, NetSet Communications has been able to bring this necessity of modern life to in excess of 20,000 Manitobans, who, simply due to the circumstance of their geography, find themselves on the other side of the digital divide.

With 15 years of business history in Brandon, NetSet Communications is a privately-held telecommunications company providing next-generation broadband services throughout the province of Manitoba. Via a network of fixed wireless system towers, NetSet provides rural and northern Manitoba with unprecedented performance and reliability never available before in such areas.

NetSet’s parent company, I-NetLink Wireless, was established in Brandon in 2001 with, at the time, a skeleton staff of 8 and a modest goal of providing Brandon’s bedroom communities of Kemnay and Forrest with high-speed connectivity. Quickly outgrowing its original location in the back of a downtown Brandon computer retail store, I-NetLink moved into a location on Douglas Street in Brandon’s east end and continued on a course of several years of steady growth, eventually leading a consortium of six other Internet Service Protocol (ISP) operators across Manitoba to form NetSet Communications in 2009. The consortium’s mandate upon formation was the provision of high-speed Internet service to rural communities and rural farm homes that Manitoba’s original broadband carriers could not reach due to high capital cost. To make that happen, the fledgling company successfully bid on a contract borne from Industry Canada’s mandate to improve rural and northern access to high-speed Internet services. The success of that project, followed by the securing of a 2nd contract with Industry Canada to continue in this vein through 2017, has since propelled NetSet to its current spot as the largest fixed wireless telecommunications company providing high-speed Internet to rural Manitoba. Through its years in operation, the company has invested more than \$40 million in infrastructure, which has all been built and serviced by Manitoba contractors and businesses.

Spanning west to the Saskatchewan border, east to the Ontario border, south to the American border and north past the 53<sup>rd</sup> parallel, NetSet Communications’ services are present in nearly 500 Manitoba communities. Customers range from those subscribing to residential high-speed Internet to companies requiring high-end secure networks for seamless business communications. In addition, NetSet is currently upgrading existing equipment to be able to offer LTE services and will



- Since inception, the company has grown from 8 employees to approximately 100, ranging from executives, tower riggers, technical specialists, help desk employees and sales and administration
- Parent company I-NetLink Wireless was established in Brandon in 2001, followed by formation of NetSet Communications in 2009
- NetSet Communications provides a mix of residential high-speed Internet, hosting of high-end secure networks for companies and government organizations and soon-to-be-launched residential digital phone service to almost 20,000 rural and northern Manitoba customers in 500 communities
- The company will occupy approximately 30,000 sq. ft. of office space in Brandon, thanks to its new 17,000 sq. ft. corporate office opening in 2016
- Company has invested more than \$40 million in infrastructure, which has all been built and serviced by Manitoba contractors and businesses
- Company CEO Charlie Clark was named the Brandon Chamber of Commerce’s 2016 Business Person of the Year

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also soon launch a residential digital phone service and a variety of other value-added security services. Though not its main thrust of service, the company has also worked behind the scenes to provide wireless Internet connection service in Brandon's Downtown HUB, as well as within a number of campgrounds in Manitoba.

The company's Brandon and Winnipeg offices employ just shy of 100 people, ranging from company executives to tower riggers, technical specialists and help desk employees to sales and administration. NetSet has also successfully formed a dealer network across Manitoba that includes 15 dealers, who, in turn, have employed staff of their own to perform the sale, installation and maintenance of NetSet's services. With annual payroll now exceeding \$5 million dollars, NetSet prides itself in investing back into its employees, with many of its current management having started with the company in entry-level positions such as installers, receptionists, administration or help desk staff. In recent years, the face of NetSet has also changed, with skilled employees coming from New Zealand, England and Nigeria, among other countries, which have fostered a multicultural work environment. NetSet has also been recognized for its contribution to the community, as CEO Charlie Clark's work to create a standard of integrity and professionalism and his provision of scholarships and donations for a variety of charities both locally and nationally has netted him a recent Brandon Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year Award.

While the nature of the telecommunications business means that NetSet cannot source many of its tech components locally, raw materials like wiring, cabling, and even its storage sheds are sourced regionally. In fact, its new 17,000 square foot corporate office on Granite Road in Brandon's new Industrial Park area is being built by a local contractor. A source of pride for NetSet in this new building will be the inclusion of a "kids room" for after-school employee use.

Upon completion of its current contract with Industry Canada, NetSet will operate in the range of 150 LTE towers across Manitoba. The company is also leveraging this contract and using its own dollars to expand into sparsely-populated areas not included in the government mandate. Once fully implemented, NetSet's LTE platform will deliver speeds that simply cannot be matched by traditional wired services, placing it, once again, on the cusp of jumping off into an entirely new host of markets.

And still, NetSet isn't setting its sights on ever becoming the next MTS or the next Bell Communications. Its purpose remains the same as it did the day the consortium was formed – to make sure that all residents of Manitoba, no matter their locale, can have access to the critical service of high-speed broadband Internet.



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