



WiFi on Steroids: Could 'White Space' save Canada's Internet?

J e s s e B r o w n

A p r i l 2 0 , 2 0 1 1



A Texan grandma is years ahead of any Canadian, technologically speaking. She was the **first** to tap into a fledgling White Space broadband network, using technology that could allow broadband WiFi access to be blanketed over entire populations, much like a radio station's signal.

In February of 2009, the U.S. switched over to digital TV, and the nation's supply of rabbit-ear antennae instantly became worthless. The switchover freed valuable low-frequency UHF spectrum—the kind that goes through walls. Canada will follow suit this August.

Google co-founder Larry Page calls White Space “**WiFi on Steroids**,” referring not only to the technology's reach, but also to the blazing speeds it could enable. Others call it “Super Wifi,” which nerds argue is technically inaccurate. But no one is arguing about the fact that White Space has the potential to completely disrupt the ISP business, rendering irrelevant the entire expensive “last mile” issue—those millions of cables leading into millions of homes.

ADVERTISEMENT

How will White Space happen? Google has pondered the possibility of providing White Space access for free to test communities. Their **rationale**? The easier it is for people to use the Internet, the more people will use the Internet, and the better for Google. If the project is deemed a success, the search giant could simply destroy the ISP business, obliterating the subscription model entirely.

Alternatively, governments could invest in White Space infrastructure and provide access as a free public utility, like water fountains in parks.

Or, new ISP entrants could bid on the spectrum and provide a competitive alternative to the existing players. Or universities could provide access, which is already happening in Houston, thanks to Rice University and the National Science Foundation.

But before any of that happens here, Canada will again have to follow America's lead; the FCC approved the unlicensed use of White Space in November of '08. The CRTC Industry Canada has yet to make any such commitment, and may choose instead to privatize the spectrum.



Filed under:

Google **White** **WiFi**
Space