



Google names broadband head, delays city choice for high-speed network

By Mike Swift

mswift@mercurynews.com

Posted: 12/15/2010 04:21:43 PM PST; Updated: 12/15/2010 06:34:34 PM PST

Google's broadband ambitions now have a leader -- Milo Medin, co-founder of the first major U.S. residential broadband provider, @Home Network. Medin's immediate job will be to help the company decide where to build a high-speed Internet demonstration network.

The flood of cities and towns that applied to get a broadband network -- civic leaders went so far as to jump into a frozen lake to catch Google's eye -- will have to wait a little bit longer for that decision. Google said Wednesday that the volume and complexity of the applications will force it to wait until early 2011 to choose where to install a broadband network up to 100 times faster than the Internet access most Americans have today.

Google struck a nerve in February when it said it was looking to choose at least one community that would get a high-speed broadband network, serving 50,000 to 500,000 people, to demonstrate how high-speed Internet could change people's lives. A total of 1,078 cities, counties and states filed applications, ranging from Anchorage, Alaska, to Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico. California had the most entries -- 130 cities and counties, including San Jose, Oakland, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Cupertino, Contra Costa County and more than a dozen other Bay Area communities.

Medin, 48, a longtime Bay Area resident who helped NASA's Ames Research Center and other federal facilities build their first Internet networks in the 1980s and 1990s, started work Monday at Google, where his title is vice president, access services. Medin said in an interview that his responsibilities at Google will go well beyond selecting the winning city and building the demonstration network.

"U.S. consumers pay more money for less service than many, many other nations, and I have always believed that telecom infrastructure -- particularly broadband Internet -- is one of the key innovation enablers. If we're paying more for less, that's a big problem," Medin said. "Google can bring scale and innovation to this space, and that was enticing enough for me to turn down some things that were pretty interesting to come here and see about delivering the future."

Since the first @Home Network opened in Fremont in 1996 -- the venture also included several cable companies -- broadband networks have not gotten dramatically faster or cheaper, the way PCs and other digital devices and services have, Medin said. The @Home Network, where Medin was chief technical officer, ultimately merged with the Internet portal Excite to form Excite@Home in 1999, a company that filed for Chapter 11 protection after the dot-com bust.

Medin, who was recruited by prominent venture capitalist -- and current Google board member -- John Doerr to launch @Home, more recently served on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's California Broadband Task Force.

The average Internet connection speed of 3 megabits per second for U.S. households now ranks 25th in the world, and is at least six times slower, and as much as 11 times slower, than countries such as Japan, Romania and South Korea, according to a broadband report released Wednesday by the Communications Workers of America.

Google has a strong business interest in boosting the number and speed of U.S. broadband connections. The faster and more friction-free a person's Internet experience, the more people tend to use Google search and other Google products. That means the Mountain View search giant makes more money.

Google said in October that it had reached an agreement with Stanford University to install a "beta" high-speed

network, with download speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second, for about 850 faculty- and staff-owned homes on campus, in preparation for the larger demonstration network.

Across the U.S. this year, Google's offer to build a superfast broadband network triggered an eruption of civic competitiveness. The mayor of Duluth, Minn., jumped into Lake Superior -- in February. Topeka, Kan., temporarily changed its name to "Google, Kansas."

Medin said he was surprised by the strength of the response, given that politicians do not always embrace technology.

"I think that vote was a vote of mass discontent," he said, adding that the lack of broadband amounts to "a tax on commerce, on innovation and on education that everybody in that community pays."

Medin said the main reason why the decision has been delayed is the complexity of weighing mundane but important factors like right-of-way access for fiber-optic cables and a community's permitting process.

"It isn't a beauty contest," Medin said of Google's decision process. "It's about what's on the inside, and not what's on the outside."

Contact Mike Swift at 408-271-3648. Follow him at [Twitter.com/swiftstories](https://twitter.com/swiftstories).

URL: http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_16867681