

# BUSINESS

## New broadband company has power to change Tahoe

By Melissa Vinitzky  
Tahoe World Staff

Devin Koch believes his new company has the power to transform the Tahoe economy. Koch is not selling year-round snow-making technology, but a painless way to connect to the Internet.

He hopes his Truckee-based company Exwire, which offers high-speed wireless Internet access to area homes, businesses, and individuals, will do nothing less than revolutionize the way people live.

By allowing people to stay connected to the Internet not matter where they are, Koch believes Exwire will encourage people and companies to relocate to Tahoe and invite tourists to extend their vacation.

Koch, a 10-year Truckee resident with a background in management consulting and wireless communications, founded Exwire only six months ago. He hasn't had a moment's rest since.

"Demand has been very high," said Koch, which he attributes to local demographics. "There are a lot of wealthy people from the Bay Area who come up to Tahoe and are used to being connected to the Internet."

Currently, most people in Tahoe access the Internet through a dial-up connection using their phone lines. This connects at a speed of nine to 50 kilobits per second (kbps), which, as frustrated Internet users across the basin know, can be maddeningly slow. Another



FROM LEFT: Jim Selby, Chief Technical Officer from National Broadband, Exwire's partner company, CEO Devin Koch, and Jeremy Mosier, general manager for the Tahoe Region, holding one of Exwire's antennas.

Doug Slater / Tahoe World

option is Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), enhanced dial-up, which Koch says a lot of Tahoe businesses "have resorted to, but it can cost double what we cost for half the speed." Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) and cable, which connects at around 256 kbps, are only available in very small pockets in the Tahoe-Truckee area.

Like DSL and cable, Exwire is a broadband technology that connects at 256 kbps, but it can be upgraded to T1 speeds of 1.54 megabits per second. This allows users to load pages 10

times faster, and download at speeds more than 100 times faster, than the average dial-up modem, according to the Exwire Web site. Unlike DSL, however, which uses phone lines, Exwire uses a radio frequency known as Wireless Fidelity (WiFi).

Since there are no cable or phone lines, Exwire connects customers through an antenna. Around 10 base stations throughout the Tahoe area, each with two to three sector antennas, transmit signals to other antennas on homes or businesses. These antennas are flat panels smaller than the average laptop. According to Koch, a single antenna can serve up to 60 customers.

For that reason, Exwire

searches for areas with high demand.

"We can serve areas with the most demand the quickest," said Koch, who distributed fliers to neighborhoods and talked to condominium complexes to determine where interest was highest. "We try to group customers and roll out in a specific pattern."

The connected areas become part of the larger network, each antenna a link in the transmitting chain. This enables Exwire to connect otherwise hard-to-reach communities, such as Alpine Meadows, where curvy roads and abundant trees could block a signal.

So far, Exwire has connected parts of Squaw Valley, Tahoe

City, Truckee, Tahoe Donner, the Truckee Airport Business Park, homes in Northstar and Lahontan businesses.

But not all of Exwire's services are based on connecting homes and businesses. The company has also created a new type of "cyber café" called a "Hot Spot," which people with WiFi-enabled laptops can visit to access the Internet. In the Tahoe-Truckee area, this means that people can go to Syd's Bagelry, Wild Cherries or the base at

one's cell phone will have the same technology."

Koch sees wireless technology as providing "a new way of life in Tahoe." He said he believes that in the past people didn't consider Tahoe a viable place for starting up a business or living full-time because of its slow Internet access. Even tourists might have passed over Tahoe for another destination with better Internet service if it meant being able to have a longer vacation by working out of their hotel or rental home.

"If you run a business out of your home, more people would come here to work and build businesses and telecommute," said Koch. "Or you could extend your vacation by sitting at a ski lodge and doing things for two hours instead of going home."

Once a person joins Exwire, they can use any of its locations to access the Internet.

Exwire, whose basic service starts at \$49 a month, also has plans specifically tailored to the Tahoe community, such as rental unit and second homeowner programs. Their Community Connect Rebate program gives one dollar from a member's monthly service fee to a local organization of their choosing, as long as the organization has also joined the program.

For more information about Exwire, call (530) 587-4312 or go to [www.exwire.com](http://www.exwire.com).

### BUSINESS PROFILE

"Business Profile" is a regular feature that looks at local businesses in the North and West shores of Tahoe. The Tahoe World does not endorse this or any other business. If you would like your business to be profiled, call the World at (530) 583-3487.

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