

How Small Businesses Are Embracing 5G

BY ANNE H. CHOW

Business.com / Mobile / Last Modified: November 29, 2018

Business, shares ways small businesses are using 5G.

"Maybe if you password-protect the Wi-Fi, they'll leave," Greg Erb's colleague told him, referring to the car lurking in the parking lot at his workplace.

Greg is the IT manager for the [Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan](#). So, you can imagine why a car that won't leave a regional chapter's parking lot would be cause for concern. And his first thought wasn't the Wi-Fi he'd just installed.

"Sure enough, as soon as I put a password on it, they took off," Greg said.

Remember when Wi-Fi was new, and you'd see people hanging around businesses on their laptops to "borrow" the connection? You don't see that as much these days, now that so many of us have fast 4G LTE connectivity in our pockets.

But Greg doesn't have your typical Wi-Fi. We're conducting a [5G mmWave fixed wireless trial](#) at the Kalamazoo, Michigan, regional Girl Scouts center. So, anyone connected to the center's Wi-Fi is connected through 5G. The reason it's so enticing is that there are very few places in the country right now where you can experience that kind of connectivity.

"For me, it was the newness. It was an opportunity that I didn't think we could pass up," Greg told me, when I asked why he decided to participate in the trial. "It's so far ahead. It's a big leap from where we stand." Coincidentally, the Girl Scout motto is "be prepared."

That's what I've heard from all the small business 5G trial customers I spoke with. The excitement around 5G is palpable, from Michigan to Austin, Texas.

"We've been giving Austinites the best car wash and service experiences for over 20 years, and this trial sounded like a way to make their experiences even better," said Dave Swenson, owner of [Arbor Car Wash & Lube Center](#) in Austin. "Think about it – everyone's on their phones in the waiting room. Now, our customers can pass the time with entertainment on the latest internet connection. No one else can claim they trialed the first 5G-enabled car wash."

I reached out to some of the trial participants because I wanted other small businesses to know what impact this new technology might have on them. 5G makes a connected and near real-time world and society possible. I truly believe our world will feel and act differently in five years. For Greg, the biggest surprises were the speed, consistency and coverage. Anyone connected to the center's Wi-Fi can connect through 5G.

"Once you get it into the building, your whole structure is covered with a Wi-Fi system powered by 5G," Greg said. "You don't have to worry about dead zones. Coupled with the Wi-Fi, the 5G service covers the entire building. And our building is pretty large."

That includes rooms where Girl Scouts, office workers and even DJs are experiencing the benefits. Greg says the building also serves as an event space, and they often rent it out for weddings on weekends. He's heard from several DJs who have been surprised at how reliable the service is for streaming songs through their cloud services.

Early small business use cases

5G will be a cloud-native network, creating speeds that blur the difference between fixed and wireless connectivity. We observed 5G latency at our trials in Waco, Texas, at a staggering nine to 12 milliseconds.

Is your small business ready for ...

Connectivity? The most common use case is connectivity. Many retailers are already mobile, going where their customers are. Our CEO said recently that our first device will be a "puck" that works like a mobile hotspot. We see increased interest in router solutions that can enhance connectivity and increase bandwidth for a small business or small office, even on the go.

Video? We are all aware of the growth in video across all industries. Mobile data traffic on AT&T's national wireless network increased more than 360,000 percent from 2007 to 2017. Video enhances employee training and communication with customers. It is also one of the most popular ways customers are entertained. Through increased bandwidth, 5G will allow small businesses to stream higher-quality (4K) video and have better customer interactions via video calls.

Performance? Have you ever visited a retailer and had to wait what felt like a full minute for your credit card transaction to go through? It may not have actually taken that long, but any delay that goes beyond a couple of seconds just doesn't feel normal, and that impacts the customer experience. When a small business is processing hundreds of transactions a day, that adds up. We measure 5G performance not only in speed, but also in latency (the time between when we hit send and when we get a response). 5G brings lower latency and will deliver faster responses than prior wireless networks.

That performance improvement is also on display with [Magnolia Market at the Silos](#) in Waco, Texas. Every day, roughly 5,000 people visit the Silos to shop, eat and unwind. The grounds were designed to provide a place for visitors to unplug and be present. That may not be the type of atmosphere where you'd think to look for the latest, most innovative technology. But Magnolia's top priority is to consistently provide the best possible experience for its

guests. Magnolia has really benefited from the technology behind the scenes in terms of increasing efficiencies; however, you'll get a glimpse of the guest benefits if you visit its food truck park.

"The summer months are some of the busiest at the Silos," said David Washburn, information technology manager at Magnolia. "Quite a high volume of guests visits our food trucks every day. With this quicker, more reliable connectivity, our vendors can process mobile payments faster than ever. This minimizes wait times for our guests and helps ensure they can focus their time on enjoying their day at the Silos."

As a self-proclaimed foodie, I can easily understand the benefits of less time waiting on – and more time eating – your favorite food truck fare.

These are just a few of the early benefits our 5G trial customers are seeing. It's an exciting frontier that will bring small business owners many opportunities to innovate, whether they're augmented realities, virtual presence, future driverless cars or things beyond our most creative imaginations.

Find out more about our 5G trials in this [blog](#) by Melissa Arnoldi.

Anne H. Chow

<https://www.business.att.com/>

200 Fifth Avenue, Second Floor

Waltham, MA 02451

888.393.5000

customercare@business.com

©2018 Business.com

AllRightsReserved.

This site is made available for educational purposes only as well as to give you general information about business practices and strategy, not to provide specific business advice. Information provided on the Business.com website should not be used as a substitute for legal, accounting, real estate, business, tax, or other types of professional advice.