Digital Economy Plan

River Valley Region — Georgia
Columbus and 16-county region

Executive Summary

The Digital Economy in the River Valley region spans the S&P 500 companies to the smallest rural farmer. All have been impacted by an explosion of tools and resources that change how we do work. How will this region respond?

What is the Digital Economy?

The Digital Economy consists of business conducted through computers and computer networks. Businesses throughout the River Valley region are transitioning to using the internet to sell products, conduct research and improve their productivity. It is difficult to find a business or institution in Georgia that does not rely on the Internet and digital technology to improve service, lower cost, automate work, or expand into new markets.

The Digital Economy is not a replacement of our economy but an evolution of using technology to adapt business to global innovation.

About the Planning Process

The River Valley Regional Commission was asked by Georgia Technology Authority to conduct a study of this region to determine its use and preparation for a Digital Economy in the 16 counties in southwest Georgia.

Because of the diversity of the region, we broke down our study to look at Columbus independent from the larger rural cities of Cordele and Americus. We also looked at the rest of the region—which is rural and sparsely populated—to make sure they stay abreast of current trends and capabilities in the Digital Economy.

Key Findings

- There are real regional strengths in the types of businesses that are in the region, the types of places people want to work, and the infrastructure to support a Digital Economy.

- Livability will be an increasingly important matrix for companies and talented workers to consider as they make decisions on whether the move to, or stay in, an community.

- Infrastructure investments continue to be needed in the region.

- There is broad understanding of the importance of understanding and transitioning to a Digital Economy.

- Training at all levels is needed throughout the region.

RVRC
RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION

Digital Economy Executive Summary

Areas of Strategic Focus

Suggestions goals, actions, costs and responsible parties was developed as a part of the planning process. These goals and actions were divided based on location in the region, with suggestions targeted to the needs in the local community. Columbus has a different set of needs based on the types and strengths of the businesses there than other places in the region.

- Increase the wireless capabilities and improve the digital infrastructure throughout the region. Make Columbus a Gigabit city and improve the reliability and access throughout the region.

- Develop and build the local small business and government capacity for the effective use of websites.

- Support small businesses in their efforts to use digital resources.

- Encourage an export economy to use the Digital Economy tools to reach customers to produce and sell goods throughout the state and beyond.

- Improve communication throughout the region to help new residents and visitors find the resources, events and places that will enhance their visit or smooth their move to the area.

- Make changes in Columbus to focus on the recruitment and retention of top engineering talent. Focus on livability and what is needed in Columbus to make it a more attractive destination for talented workers the employers in Columbus need to attract.

- Continue the education efforts to train residents on basic computer skills as well as higher level programing skills throughout the region.

- Develop a Makerspace in Columbus to encourage entrepreneurial activity and serve as a place for people to gather to develop new ideas.

- Expand capital sources throughout the region. Work to create a source of venture capital in Columbus.

Survey Results

In two online surveys, we asked respondents to identify what they were doing online and how they accessed the Internet. The surveys were sent out for

One open ended question asked respondents what training was needed. Of the responses received, specific training was requested in the following categories: Website Development, Microsoft Office, Social Media, Smartphone / Mobile Devices, and Networking and Server Maintenance.

For more information on the Digital Economy, contact Jim Livingston at:

rivervalleydigitaleconomy@gmail.com

see our project website:

rivervalleydigitaleconomy.info

Ellaville, GA businesses are recognizing the importance of communicating with their customers.

RVRC
RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION