

# GREAT Connections

## Digging Up History at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park





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# GREAT Connections

**There are times when all of us need to dig deep.** It may be when facing a particularly difficult business challenge or undergoing big transitions—situations that require us to access every available resource.

We were inspired to explore this “dig” theme due to the **Business Spotlight on Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park** on pages 4 and 5 of this *GREAT Connections* issue. Digs by paleontologists over the years have produced an amazing collection of fossils from ancient animals. To enable the park to share the finds via virtual field trips, Great Plains Communications will soon provide fiber Internet service.

Most research requires digging through information and reviewing the experiences of others. You’ll get a bit of both when studying the remaining articles in this issue. On page 3, we ask the question, **Is Your Website Mobile Friendly?** and invite you to dig into this topic as it relates to your business. **Reevaluating and Reinventing**—two activities being done by small communities across the country—are covered on page 6. Then on page 7, we uncover the difference between **Shared Bandwidth vs. Dedicated Bandwidth**.

Great Plains Communications knows the best solution to any problem may take some digging to find. Give us a call to discuss your communications needs.



Sincerely,

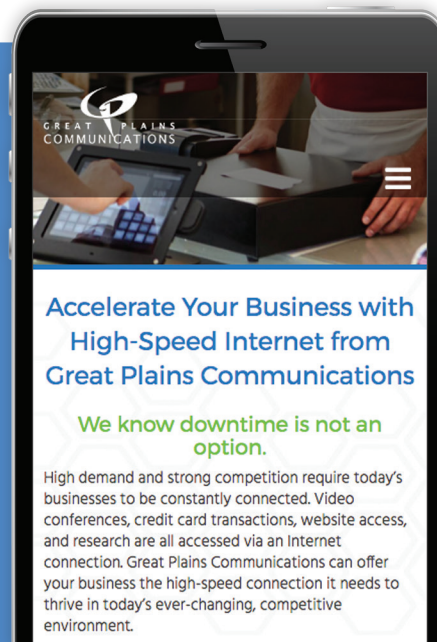
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd A. Foje".

Todd Foje  
*Chief Executive Officer*



# Is Your Website Mobile Friendly?

*If the answer is, “No” or “I’m not sure,” this article is for you*



**Grab your smartphone right now and go to your company’s website. Is there a lot of text? Do you have to pinch or zoom in to read it? If so, your users may get frustrated and go elsewhere.**

The desktop version of a website is often difficult to view and use on the small screen of a smartphone or tablet. Given the fact that many of users will visit your website on a mobile device, it’s important for them to have a positive experience when they get there.

Keep in mind that mobile usage in the U.S. is growing. StatCounter reports mobile usage was 42 percent in June 2017, up from 31 percent in June 2016. By contrast, desktop usage fell from 61 percent to 48 percent during the same period.<sup>1</sup>

## Mobile-Friendly Features

What makes a website a mobile-friendly one? Generally speaking, it’s designed with features including:

- Larger text which is easier to read on a smaller screen
- Mobile-friendly navigation which quickly displays the most relevant content
- Touch-friendly buttons and page elements, placed far enough apart to be easily tapped
- Faster download speed
- Avoidance of software (like Flash) not typically available on mobile devices

## Benefits for Your Company

In addition to improving the user experience, having a mobile-friendly website can provide your company with other valuable benefits. Topping this list is improved search visibility, meaning your company may appear higher up on the list when prospects search for the products/services you offer. This is because Google uses mobile-friendliness as a ranking signal and favors these types of websites in its search rankings.

If your small business has not optimized your website for mobile, doing so may help you improve your results and increase your bottom line.

## New Great Plains Communications Website

Great Plains Communications is “practicing what we preach.” We recently launched our new website which includes a mobile-friendly design along with expanded content for business and residential customers.

**We invite you to check out our website at [www.gpcom.com](http://www.gpcom.com) to see our improvements firsthand. To find out if your website has a mobile-friendly design and get recommendations from Google, visit [www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly](http://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly).**

<sup>1</sup> <http://gs.statcounter.com/platform-market-share/desktop-mobile-tablet/united-states-of-america>



# Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park

*Thanks to fiber Internet, more people today can experience ancient history*

This national treasure called Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park got its start about 12 million years ago. At that time, a volcano in southwest Idaho spread a blanket of ash over many miles, and one or two feet of this powder covered the flat savannah-like grasslands in northeastern Nebraska. Within several weeks, animals gathered around a waterhole in the area died, and their bodies were covered by ash. This preserved their skeletons for today's paleontologists to study and the public to see.

## Travel Back in Time

Visitors have access to interpretive displays and the fossil preparation laboratory and can ask the paleontologists there about their work. The park also includes the Hubbard Rhino Barn, where new fossil discoveries continue to be unearthed. Fossil evidence at the site reveals complete, articulated skeletons of large mammals, birds and turtles, as well as seeds of grasses and trees.

Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park is in Antelope County, four miles east and six miles north of the village of Orchard. Due to its remote location far from a population center, getting adequate communications services has been a challenge.

## A Need for More Bandwidth

Superintendent Rick Otto notes, "The satellite Internet service we've been using is limited in speed, and its lag

time disrupts any interactive transmissions we're trying to host. In addition, many of our callers have complained about the poor audio quality of the current phone system. Clearly, changes needed to be made since the local provider was simply not able to provide the level of technology we require."

To develop a solution to these challenges, Great Plains Communications has been in discussion for several years with the State of Nebraska on a fiber project to bring more bandwidth to Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park. The installation is scheduled for completion in August 2017. Funding of the fiber optic cable was made possible by a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

What is Otto expecting after Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park becomes a customer of Great Plains Communications? He replies, "I expect to see a night-and-day



difference between our new fiber Internet service compared to our current satellite service. I am also looking forward to having significantly better audio quality during our phone calls. What's more, I appreciate how friendly and informative the team from Great Plains Communications has been during the planning process."

### Virtual Field Trips

The vastly improved speed of fiber Internet from Great Plains Communications will be especially beneficial. Otto explains, "We're open seven months a year and get about 20,000 visitors annually. The park is operated entirely with funds generated by admissions fees and gift shop sales; we receive no tax dollars. After Great Plains Communications finishes the installation of fiber Internet service here, we'll have the speed we need to offer virtual field trips to classrooms all over the world."

**After Great Plains Communications finishes the installation of fiber Internet service here, we'll have the speed we need to offer virtual field trips to classrooms all over the world."**

— RICK OTTO, SUPERINTENDENT, ASHFALL FOSSIL BEDS STATE HISTORICAL PARK

He adds, "These virtual field trips will be a win-win addition to our educational services. Schools will benefit by being able to give students the feel of visiting Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park without the time and expense of travel. And the park will benefit by bringing in the additional revenues generated by the fees for virtual field trips."

Great Plains Communications is honored to help enhance the capabilities of Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park. It's one example of our longstanding commitment to Nebraska.



Inside the Visitor Orientation Center (left) are interpretive displays and the fossil preparation laboratory. Regan Douglas (right) is a University of Nebraska-Lincoln student from Weeping Water, Nebraska. She's looking for micro-fossils—tiny bones and teeth from small animals that lived around the Ashfall waterhole.



### Bronze Sculptures Bring Fossils to Life

In June 2017, the University of Nebraska State Museum dedicated two bronze sculptures at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park. One depicts barrel-bodied rhinos locked in battle, and the other is a replica of a giant tortoise. They were designed by Garry Staab, renowned artist and Nebraska native, to represent two species whose fossils were buried in ash for millions of years at the ancient watering hole.

Superintendent Rick Otto notes, "These are life-sized sculptures which give our visitors a good idea of what these animals would have been like when they roamed the earth. They're a popular backdrop for photos—kids love to get their pictures taken in front of them."

The sculptures were a gift from the Theodore F. and Claire M. Hubbard Family Foundation. The Hubbard family is a supporter of many programs at the University of Nebraska State Museum and previously funded a 17,500-square-foot, climate-controlled barn that allows Ashfall visitors to watch scientists unearth fossils.



# Reevaluating and Reinventing

*How rural communities are changing inside and out to overcome their challenges*

**Rural communities all over the country are facing steady depopulation, economic decline and deteriorating main streets. This typically stems from the loss of a community's original or main industries that provided the foundation for the local economy in the past. Despite these challenges, there are ways for rural families, businesses and leaders to work together to turn things around.**

## Taking a Fresh Look

It starts with taking a fresh look at the rural community. This often involves:

- **Reevaluating** current assets such as historic buildings in the downtown area, a beautiful rural landscape, low cost of living, unique cultural/arts resources and potential for entrepreneurial businesses.
- **Reinventing** the community's appearance and use of technology to make it a more attractive place for residents to live and travelers to visit.

While beautification of building exteriors, through painting and other "spruce up" projects, is often where rural communities begin their efforts toward positive change, it's important for them to also invest in the improvements not readily seen—communications technology. For example, high-speed Internet helps to level the playing field between rural communities and big cities as well as makes it easier for rural communities to attract new businesses and recruit new talent.

## Working Together, Leveraging Technology

Robust partnerships between local government, nonprofits, business organizations and community groups are essential to the success of reinvention. While most economic development strategies involve trying to recruit major employers, many small towns and cities complement recruitment by emphasizing their existing assets and distinctive resources.

Rural communities can get help from Cool & Connected, a planning assistance program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service, EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities and the Appalachian Regional Commission. Cool & Connected helps small towns use broadband service to revitalize main streets. Communities can combine broadband service with other local assets such as cultural and recreational amenities to attract investment and people as well as diversify local economies.

## Is It Time to Reevaluate Your Internet Plan?

The Internet plan you selected a couple of years ago may not be up to the demands your business places on it today. Have you added employees? Are there more devices in use? Do you experience slowdowns when video streaming or uploading large files?

It's a good idea to periodically reevaluate your bandwidth usage to see if an Internet plan upgrade is needed, and Great Plains Communications is here to help.

We offer a variety of Internet solutions for businesses including high-speed Internet and managed Ethernet. At Great Plains Communications, we don't expect your business to fit in a box. That's why we customize services to meet the unique technology and communication needs of every business customer – from the largest enterprise to a small storefront.

**To learn more about our Internet solutions for businesses, visit [www.gpccom.com/business](http://www.gpccom.com/business) or call 402-456-6467.**





# Shared Bandwidth VS. Dedicated Bandwidth

*What's the difference between them and when should each one be used?*



**A consideration commonly overlooked when businesses make decisions about Internet service is whether to use shared bandwidth, dedicated bandwidth or a combination of the two.**

## Defining the Terms

Shared bandwidth means you share the same uplink to your ISP as many other customers. This is most likely the type of connection you use at home. With shared bandwidth, you sign up for a plan that provides speeds that are advertised as something like “up to 15 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload.” These speeds are the fastest you can expect, but there may be other limiting factors, like the number of other users online at any given time.

Consider the analogy of a busy highway. During rush hour, all four lanes are congested with heavy traffic. You can get where you're going, but it may take longer than at other times. During non-peak times, there are fewer cars on the road, so you can move faster. As with shared bandwidth, the less traffic, the faster your speed.

By contrast, dedicated bandwidth is reserved for use by your business only, and your Internet speeds aren't affected by other users and won't fluctuate. If you choose dedicated bandwidth with 100 Mbps download and 100 Mbps upload, for example, those are the speeds you will consistently experience.

A lane on the highway designated only for your personal use is like dedicated bandwidth. Without anyone else in the lane to encumber movement, you can travel quickly at all times.

## Questions to Consider

Before making a decision about which type of bandwidth is best for your company, ask yourself the following questions:

- **How problematic is it if your Internet speed slows down sometimes?** If you have a small business with relatively light Internet usage, it's probably not an issue; in which case, the less expensive option of shared bandwidth might be the right choice. However, if your business is larger and uses video, regularly uploads large files or performs other functions requiring faster speeds, you may be better served by the guaranteed speeds of dedicated bandwidth.
- **Do you offer Wi-Fi to customers and visitors?** If so, you might want to consider a combination of dedicated bandwidth for use by employees and shared bandwidth for your customer Wi-Fi.
- **Do you use web-based applications?** The 100 percent reliability of a dedicated connection is best for businesses that use web-based applications such as Microsoft CRM.

**It's not that one type of bandwidth is better than the other. One may just be more appropriate for your business. Call Great Plains Communications at 402-456-6467 to discuss which type of bandwidth would best meet your needs.**



*Today's business and leisure travelers expect to be able to connect with work, social media and entertainment. Great Plains Communications provides our guests with the Internet quality and speed they expect."*

— NATALIE ALRED, MANAGER

**Cobblestone Hotel & Suites** in McCook, Nebraska is conveniently located and appointed to meet the needs of those traveling for business or fun (or both). Great Plains Communications provides the Internet, phone and television services to keep guests happy and employees working efficiently. Manager Natalie Alred says, "Without the great service from Great Plains, our business would definitely not be where it is today."

**Call 402-456-6467 today**

to discuss communications solutions for your business.

