

WHITE
PAPER

Businesses Looking to Boost Productivity Through Fiber Internet

Survey-driven thought leadership by
ATLANTIC-ACM

May 2021

Introduction

A reliable Internet connection is increasingly critical as businesses grow their usage of cloud and SaaS applications, OTT video content, and unified communication platforms for core business operations. For many businesses, high speed and low latency connectivity comes with the potential to make web-based services more responsive, resulting in reduced employee downtime and near-instant access to the information that employees depend on daily.

To assess end user preference for high-speed fiber Internet solutions, ATLANTIC-ACM conducted a survey of over 250 Mid-Market and Enterprise buyers in the U.S. The following white paper outlines the key takeaways from this research.

Survey results strongly emphasize the importance of Internet access, with majority of respondents indicating that 75% or more of their workforce requires a reliable Internet connection to do their job. The pandemic has only added to the importance, with over 90% of respondents saying that with COVID-19 the need for reliable connectivity has become more significant. As a result, more than 75% of the surveyed organizations that currently buy “non-fiber” solutions like cable modem are exploring symmetric fiber Internet to meet their evolving requirements.

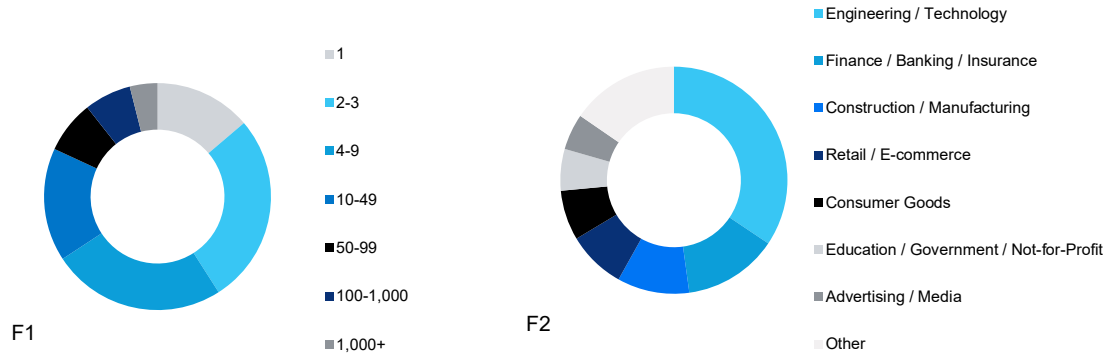
Respondent Demographics

Key demographics targeted as part of the study included CTOs, telecom spend decision makers, network administrators, IT system managers, and those responsible for connectivity repair/troubleshooting within organizations.

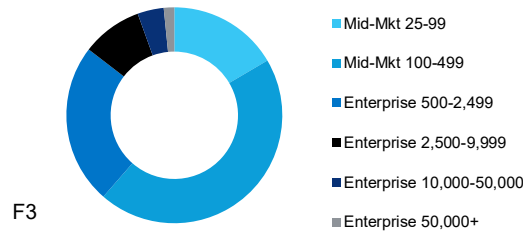
The sample of over 250 respondents was spread across a range of single and multi-site businesses (figure 1) operating in several different industry verticals (figure 2). Respondents from companies with 25 to less than 500 employees were categorized as Mid-Market, while those with over 500 employees were considered Enterprise buyers. (figure 3)

F1
Number of Locations
(% of Respondents)

F2
Industry Vertical
(% of Respondents)

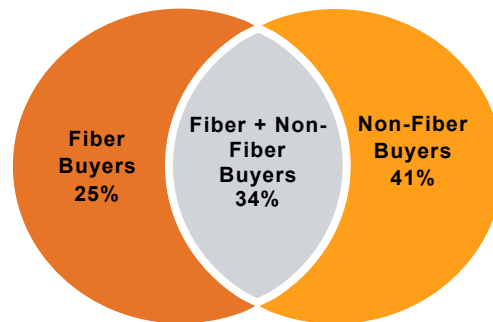


F3
Employee Count
(% of Respondents)



Respondents were also tagged as “Non-Fiber” and “Fiber” buyers (figure 4). The “non-fiber” set included those who buy solutions like cable modem broadband, wireless Internet, digital subscriber line (DSL), and dedicated Internet access (DIA) over copper. The “fiber” category included those currently buying fiber Internet solutions, including fiber broadband and DIA over fiber.

F4
Current Internet
Solutions
(% of Respondents)



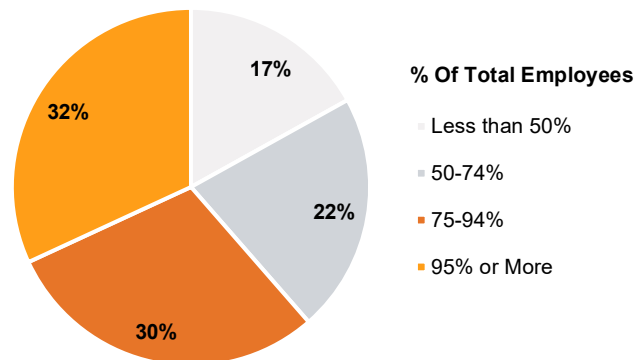
Rising Importance of a Reliable Internet Connection for Mid-Market and Enterprise Buyers

With rising digitization and business process automation, dependence on a reliable Internet connection is growing. Increased usage of cloud is driving businesses to demand high speed Internet access to improve performance of Hosted SaaS, VoIP, UC, and other applications. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to estimate what percentage of their company's workforce depends on Internet to do their job. Over 60% of respondents reported that "75% or more" of employees required reliable Internet access to do their job (see figure 5). The dependence on Internet was noted to be even higher for Enterprise customers (500+ employees), where 68% of respondents said that "75% or more" of employees could not be productive without Internet access.

62% of surveyed companies cite that more than 75% of their employees require Internet to do their job.

F5

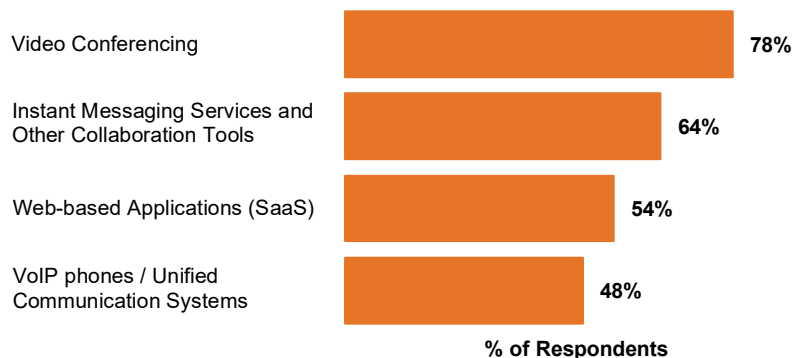
% of Employees in Organizations Requiring Internet to Do their Job (% of Respondents)



Strong dependence on the Internet was also reflected in adoption rates of key web-based services like video conferencing and collaboration tools (figure 6). Respondents also rated these web-based services in terms of their importance to overall business operations, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very important. Services like video conferencing, VoIP, collaboration tools, and software-as-a-service (SaaS) applications all received high scores averaging 4.4 or higher.

F6

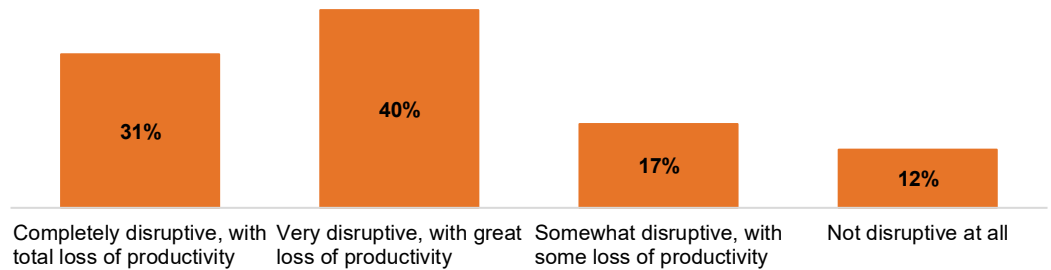
Adoption of Web-based Services (% of Respondents)



With growing dependence on the Internet, buyers are becoming cognizant of the impact an Internet outage can have on business operations. More than 70% of survey respondents said that such an outage would be either “completely disruptive with total loss of productivity” or “very disruptive with great loss of productivity”. (figure 7). Besides the disruptive impact of an outage, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the need for a reliable Internet connection even more significant for those using web-based services to communicate and connect to resources and team members as they work from remote locations. (figure 8)

F7

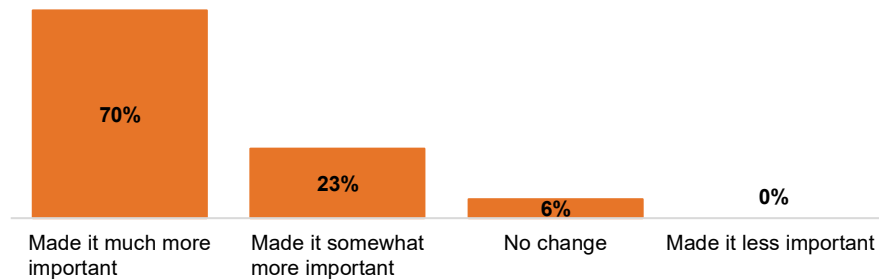
Impact of Internet Outage on Business Operations (% of Respondents)



71% of respondents find an Internet outage to be completely or very disruptive. 93% feel COVID-19 has made a reliable Internet connection more important.

F8

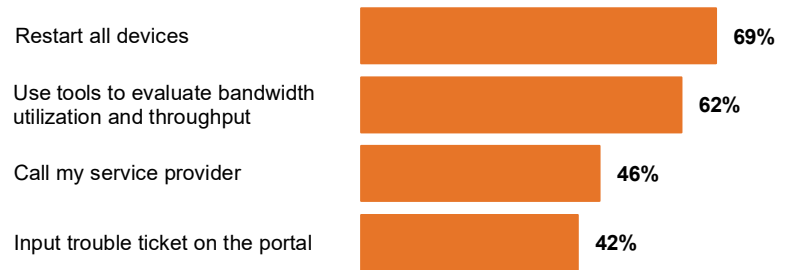
Impact of the Pandemic on Need for a Reliable Internet Connection (% of Respondents)



As the impact of an Internet outage becomes more disruptive, troubleshooting practices adopted by in-house IT teams are also evolving gradually. More than 60% of respondents responsible for troubleshooting within their companies said that they use “tools to evaluate bandwidth utilization and throughput” as one of the first steps while troubleshooting issues. As a result, Internet services packaged with seamless access to digital portals with self-diagnostic and troubleshooting capabilities are expected to gain traction.

F9

First Steps to Troubleshooting
(% of Respondents)



Business Outcomes of Fiber Solutions

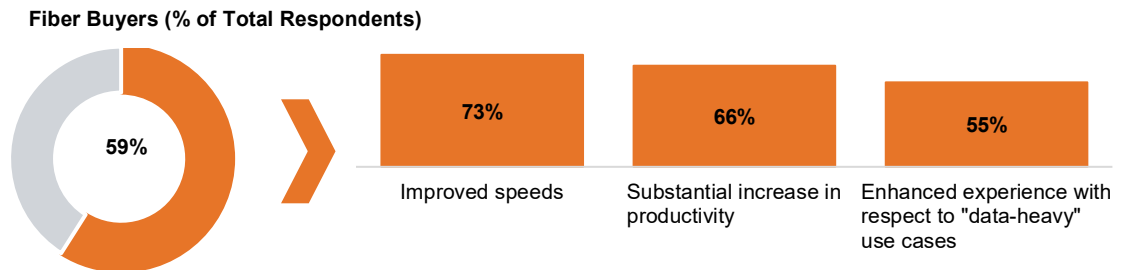
For many businesses, high speed and low latency connectivity comes with the potential to make web-based services, including cloud applications more responsive and capable, resulting in reduced employee downtime and near-instant access to the information that employees depend on daily.

Survey results depict that reliability and security lead as desirable Internet features, with an average score of 4.4, closely followed by consistent bandwidth and download speed. Given the technological characteristics of a fiber-based Internet connection, it offers the required features that applications like cloud access, video conferencing, and data streaming require.

Of the total 254 respondents, approx. 59% currently purchase fiber solutions, including broadband and DIA for either some or all of their business locations. The majority of these buyers cited that fiber solutions have positively impacted their productivity, upload/download speeds, and overall user experience.

F10

How Has Fiber Benefited Your Company
(% of Respondents)



In terms of service features compelling these buyers to move to fiber, additional bandwidth and symmetrical Internet access speeds were most mentioned by respondents. Seamless troubleshooting support, strict SLAs around network availability, and self-provisioning capabilities offer greater room for differentiation, with less than 45% of respondents citing these features as being available from their current service provider.

The majority of respondents who currently buy fiber Internet solutions saw benefits like improved productivity, speeds, and user experience.

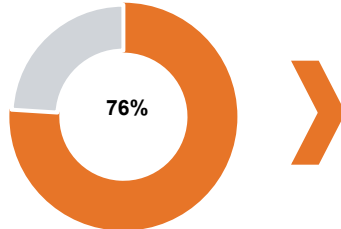
Fiber Internet Gaining Traction Among Broadband buyers

Given the rising importance of a reliable Internet connection and the ability of a fiber solution to effectively meet evolving business requirements, more than 75% of non-fiber Internet buyers are exploring symmetrical fiber Internet solutions. The majority of this cohort is represented by Cable Broadband and Wireless Internet buyers.

F11

Top 3 Drivers Causing Businesses to Consider Fiber Internet (% of Respondents)

Those Exploring Fiber Solutions (% of Non-Fiber Internet Buyers)



Driver	Portion of Respondents Giving a Rank 1 (out of 7)
Bandwidth Needs and Support for Multiple Users	33%
Greater Reliability	19%
Improved Security	15%

Businesses are demanding higher bandwidth connections as they increase usage of SaaS, UC, internal applications, and OTT video content. More than 65% of respondents ranked bandwidth needs and support for multiple users among the top 3 drivers to consider fiber Internet, closely followed by 55% of respondents looking for greater reliability.

Three-fourths of respondents who buy broadband are now exploring fiber-based Internet driven by the need for greater bandwidth, reliability, and security.

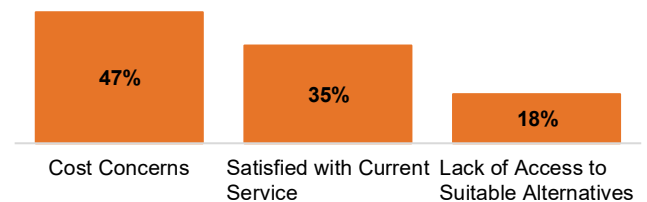
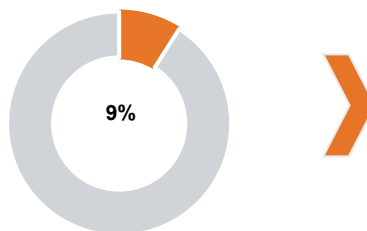
Also, when evaluating fiber Internet solutions, over 50% of survey respondents cited that they would consider additional bandwidth, simple pricing and configurations, and seamless troubleshooting as key selection criteria.

For those who are not considering fiber Internet and only looking to adopt asymmetrical broadband, cost concerns were the most mentioned inhibitor (figure 12). While those who were unsure of which solution would work best for their organization were still interested in knowing about a symmetric fiber Internet solution. (figure 13)

F12

Switching Challenges (% of Respondents)

Those Not Exploring Fiber Solutions (% of Non-Fiber Internet Buyers)



Those Unsure about which Network Solution Works Best (% of Non-Fiber Buyers)



F13

Those Unsure but Interested in Learning About Fiber Solutions (% of Respondents)

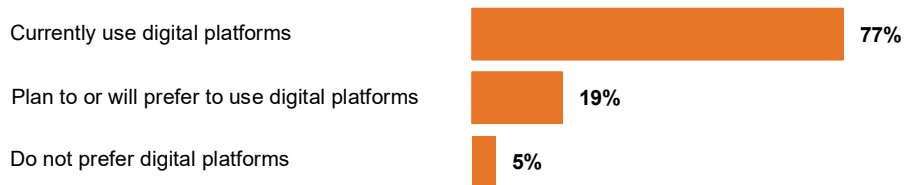
Digital Self Provisioning Portals – An Emerging Differentiator

With growing standardization of Internet services, providers are looking to differentiate by offering several functionalities through self-serve digital portals. Network monitoring, self-diagnostics, trouble ticketing, and automated provisioning are some of the key functionalities being offered.

Though 77% of respondents are currently using some form of digital platforms (figure 14), more than 40% feel that the functionalities like network monitoring and proactive troubleshooting either function poorly or are not offered at all, indicating significant room for differentiation. (figure 15)

F14

Adoption of Digital Platforms (% of Respondents)



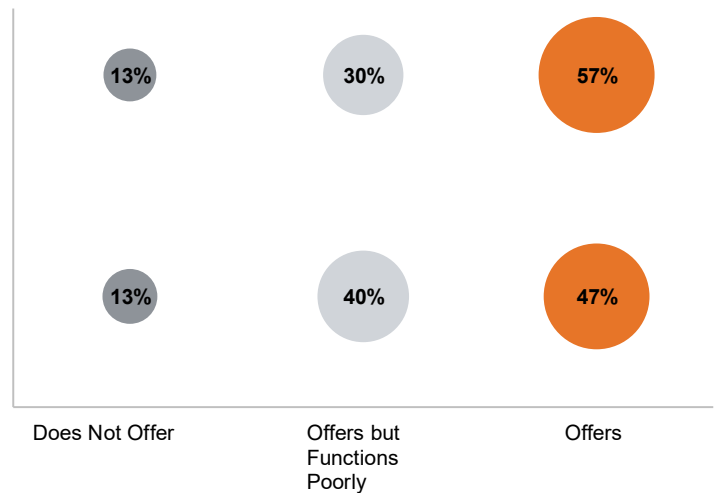
77% of respondents use some form of digital platforms, though features like network monitoring and proactive troubleshooting offer room for differentiation.

F15

Digital Platform Features – Current Level of Satisfaction (% of Respondents)

Network Monitoring and Real Time Data for Greater Control of Operating Environment

Proactive Troubleshooting



Conclusion

With organizations increasing use of cloud applications and collaboration tools, having a reliable and fast Internet connection is more important than ever before. Changing work environments in wake of the pandemic are also aggravating the need for secure and high-speed connectivity. Given the inherent benefits of a fiber-based symmetric Internet connection, organizations who are currently using “non-fiber” solutions like cable broadband are looking to adopt fiber Internet.

As buyers increasingly evaluate fiber-based services, features like additional bandwidth, support for multiple users, simple pricing and configurations continue to be top of mind considerations, while strict SLAs around network availability and access to self-serve portals offer significant room for differentiation. Adoption of these digital platforms has grown over the years, with 77% respondents saying that they currently use such platforms, however, more than 40% feel that functionalities like network monitoring and proactive troubleshooting either function poorly or are not offered at all indicating room for differentiation.

Looking ahead, service providers who effectively package a symmetric fiber Internet service with seamless troubleshooting support, near perfect network availability, and access to user-friendly self-serve digital platforms will appeal to customers who recognize that an outage can be highly disruptive.



Why Lumen?

With ~450,000 route miles of fiber around the world, Lumen helps businesses get enterprise-level service at an affordable price. Lumen delivers the all-in-one platform that combines Adaptive Networking, edge cloud solutions, Connected Security and UC&C to accelerate next-generation business applications and data.