

A Case Study in Bold Transformation:

Lumbee River EMC's ISP Journey



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Established in 1940, Lumbee River EMC is an electric cooperative that has served over 54,000 member-owners in eastern North Carolina for nearly a century. Its long-standing commitment to their members and a culture of innovation are its guiding principles.

This innovative spirit was evident when the cooperative was gearing up for contract negotiations with their third-party internet service providers (ISPs). Lumbee River EMC, despite owning its physical fiber network infrastructure for nearly 10 years, had always depended on third-party ISPs to provide internet directly to its customers.

To address this, Lumbee River EMC brought in JSI as a consulting partner to aid in their contract negotiations. After evaluating the options, the cooperative leadership and JSI came to an unexpected conclusion. They realized that they could establish themselves as their own ISP.

Though the journey to becoming an ISP is not for the faint of heart, Lumbee River EMC chose not to play it safe. Instead, it embarked on this transformative journey with JSI at its side.

A Long List of Challenges

Launching a completely new service is a daunting task for any business. This was certainly the case for Lumbee River EMC as it started planning the ISP transition with JSI. The list of tasks, potential questions and unknowns was extensive. Steps included a full network redesign and rebuild, acquisition of the necessary technology stack, retraining existing staff, hiring new talent and developing a long-term growth strategy. Then, there was the pressure of onboarding customers with the cooperative's reputation at stake.

Despite the daunting nature of these challenges, Lumbee River EMC leaders didn't hesitate. They moved forward, bolstered by the unwavering confidence in their team and the support from JSI's experienced experts. Even though maintaining the status quo would have been easier, the cooperative's team members didn't hesitate to bet on themselves and move forward fearlessly.

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We are thrilled to partner with Lumbee River to build their broadband network, enhance their business operations, and support their rapid ISP growth.

— Michele Friedman, JSI COO

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Lumbee River EMC and JSI Forge Ahead

Companies who embark on new business ventures often start with a seemingly paradoxical question: How do we map a road we've never traveled? For Lumbee River EMC, it started with placing trust in JSI and a team that had made the ISP journey many times.

That's why the process started with the ISP project team adopting a new mantra: Know thyself.

JSI and Lumbee River EMC started by creating a detailed inventory of the cooperative's talent, workflows and existing technology stack. Surprisingly, this process helped the teams realize the cooperative already owned a significant amount of the technology that would be needed for its ISP journey. That greatly informed an aggressive six-month timeline for launching the cooperative's new internet service.

One of the first steps was to rebuild and redesign the cooperative's network from scratch. During

this process, JSI also identified key opportunities for improving Lumbee River EMC's network. This included upgrading the network to IPV6, the most advanced network layer protocol, which handles packets more efficiently and provides enhanced performance and security. The goal was not to meet the minimum requirements for the cooperative's new network. Instead, the team looked for ways to raise performance and security standards throughout the project.

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JSI helped us to attain, organize and implement a long-term solution via the necessary tools to operate an independent ISP.

— John Dyson, Lumbee River EMC COO

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However, portraying this as a wholly linear process wouldn't do justice to the flexibility, focus and creativity of both the cooperative team members and JSI's consultants. New challenges arose constantly, requiring fresh solutions to be proposed and implemented just as quickly. This included repurposing existing technology and training existing staff members on new procedures.

Time and again, when faced with obstacles, the two teams collaborated to keep the project moving forward despite the mounting pressure of an impending deadline. While JSI and Lumbee River EMC's technical teams worked on deploying the new network, new customers were already being onboarded in anticipation of the new ISP's launch.

With no option to turn back, the teams pressed forward and successfully launched Lumbee River EMC's new internet service six months after their ISP journey began.

A Bold Choice Pays Major Dividends

Lumbee River EMC launched its own ISP, RIVR Tech, and set a new standard for high-speed internet across its service area in eastern North Carolina. With RIVR Tech, the cooperative was finally able to offer its members the kind of exemplary service and value that Lumbee River EMC has been known for since 1940.

There was more good news. Lumbee River EMC was pleasantly surprised to see that in its first year of operations, RIVR Tech was already on track to deliver a significant return on investment.

RIVR Tech came about thanks to Lumbee River EMC's bold, unwavering belief in the power of innovation. In the end, this resulted in revenue that exceeded expectations and new high-quality internet service options for rural, underserved communities across eastern North Carolina.

In fact, if the current trend continues, RIVR Tech is projected to add over 5,000 new customers within the next 12 months, nearly doubling the size of their subscriber base at launch.

+5,000
New Customers



12
Months

nearly doubling the size of their subscriber base!

JSI is proud to have provided the consultation, support and expertise that helped make it possible.



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