

Arizona State University hosts “Wiring the Rez: Innovative Strategies for Business Via E-Commerce Conference”

Internet access is a right that should be guaranteed to all citizens, whether they live in a city or on a rural Indian reservation. It must be a priority to our nation to expand and provide internet resources to those living on Native reservations. Tribal governments have recognized telecommunications technology as essential to their growth and are looking for opportunities to build the technological infrastructure that would bridge the digital divide.

As many American Indian tribes have recently become involved in pursuing business operations over the Internet, their businesses have rejuvenated economies across Indian country. However the quick growth of the e-commerce industry has outpaced a general understanding of many relevant regulatory and legal issues, where state, tribal and federal laws and policies are colliding.

From tribal lending to selling tribal and Indian goods and services, e-commerce is the future for successful tribal economies. Tribal leaders, directors and members must have a better understanding of why e-commerce is important to their reservations and how the internet can expand a tribe’s market.

On Feb 1-2, 2018 the Indian Legal Program at the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at ASU and the Rosette, LLP Economic Development Program will hold a conference titled: ***“Wiring the Rez: Innovative Strategies for Business Development via E-Commerce”*** at the Wild Horse Pass Hotel & Casino on the Gila River Indian Community. The conference will include Keynote Speaker Hilary Tompkins, Partner at Hogan Lovells LLP and former Solicitor of the Department of Interior, as well as John Tahsuda III, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, and Chris James, President and CEO of the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development and former Associate Administrator at the U.S. Small Business Administration, as well as the renowned internationally-known speaker, activist and author, Winona LaDuke who is the Executive Director of Honor The Earth. The speaker line-up also includes scholars and experts in the fields of internet connectivity, finance, gaming, taxation, cyber-security and entrepreneurship in Indian Country.

The goal of this event is to explore how tribes and individual Indians can access and navigate the e-commerce environment in Indian Country. Speakers will address how the changing political landscape may affect tribal business opportunities, and how tribes can structure ownership, management, and regulatory control of tribal entities as they pioneer new business sectors via e-commerce.

Why is e-commerce important?

Very few Indian reservations have functioning economies in which residents can be employed, purchase products and services, and find adequate housing on the reservation. Reservation residents typically have to travel to distant cities to go to banks, businesses they can patronize, higher education, find livable wage jobs, and adequate housing. This situation is a disaster for building reservation economies and community stability and addressing poverty, unemployment, and other issues that Indian nations face. E-commerce is a promising avenue that tribal governments and communities can utilize to address these problems.

E-commerce can assist in keeping dollars on reservations

Indian reservations rapidly lose the money that residents receive because of the absence of a variety of businesses where people can spend money. This leads to the loss of an enormous amount of economic activity and employment for Indian Country. Economists use the word “leakage” to define this situation where money leaves a local community or economy before it can circulate within the community. A solution to this problem is for tribal governments and reservation entrepreneurs to increase the number of businesses operating in Indian Country by utilizing e-commerce.

A second economic principle that supports the development of reservation based e-commerce is called the “multiplier effect.” This defines the situation where every dollar that is spent by one person ends up as profit and salary in the hands of others. This new person then also spends that one dollar and passes it on to others who will also spend it. In this fashion, one dollar echoes, or “multiplies”, throughout an economy and becomes pay, profit, and spending money for a greater number of people as long as the dollar stays within the local economy. The only way for reservation communities to benefit from the multiplier effect and to keep dollars circulating within their economies is to create more reservation-based businesses.

Developing tribal and entrepreneurial e-commerce businesses on reservation

Governments play a crucial role in developing a private, free market economic system. They protect the public interest, ensure fair competition, maintain law and order, and create laws and courts that help enforce contracts and property rights. Governments create and enforce the rules that ensure a fair system that attracts investors to invest their time and money. Tribal governments play this important role for reservation economies. Tribal governments can encourage businesses to locate on reservations by adopting these kinds of laws and creating stable and fair court systems and bureaucracies. In addition, tribes can use taxation and regulatory strategies to attract investments and businesses to reservations.

[Click here to visit the conference website for more information](#)

Tribal government and non-profit registration discounts available. Email ILP@asu.edu for access code.

The State Bar of Arizona does not approve or accredit CLE activities for the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education requirement. This activity may qualify for up to 13 general credit hours toward your annual CLE requirement for the State Bar of Arizona.

For more information, please email: ILP@asu.edu

Kate Rosier,
Executive Director, Indian Legal Program
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University

Robert Miller
Professor of Law,
Faculty Director, Rosette LLP American Indian Economic Development Program
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University