**CATEGORY**:EXCELLENCE IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY/OTHER | 9. MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**TITLE:** Hughes and 4-H: Connecting Youth to STEM Education Resources Amidst America’s Drive to Digital

**COMPANY:** Hughes Network Systems, LLC

**LOCATION:** Germantown, Maryland

**INDUSTRY:** Telecommunications

**Overview:**

Hughes Network Systems, LLC (HUGHES), is an innovator in satellite and multi-transport technologies and networks for the past 50 years. The company’s flagship broadband service, HughesNet®, is the world's largest high-speed satellite Internet service—connecting millions of people across the Americas. Fueling this industry leadership positioning are more than 1,000 Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) professionals on the Hughes team. STEM is the unequivocal driving force behind every satellite and multi-transport technology breakthrough Hughes has ever engineered and continues to develop, including HughesNet and the company’s newest satellite, JUPITER™ 3, expected to be the world’s largest commercial satellite ever when it launches in 2023.

Recognizing the critical role STEM plays in driving innovation, including at its own company, prompted Hughes to enter a multi-year sponsorship of 4­H, America’s largest youth development organization that aims to inspire and educate the next generation of STEM students and leaders. Over the last eight years, Hughes has supported numerous 4-H STEM events, scholarships and contests. The Hughes team also works with 4-H to conceptualize, help develop, and sponsor 4-H [STEM Lab](http://www.4-h.org/stemlab), a free platform of interactive STEM-focused activities for young people, available to anyone with Internet access.

During the pandemic, HughesNet-sponsored STEM Lab laid the essential groundwork for 4-H to pivot its entire online education initiative and scale it into a broader educational activity hub called [4-H at Home](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/). 4[-H at Home](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/) was designed to meet the growing needs for virtual and non-virtual educational resources that can be easily used by families at home or rapidly adopted by educators. The site was developed with cooperation from 4-H’s [Cooperative Extension System](https://nifa.usda.gov/cooperative-extension-system), which includes over 100 land-grant universities, Hughes and local 4-H groups.

**Strategy:**

As students, parents and educators adapted to a new normal throughout the pandemic, driven by the digitalization of everything and the move toward virtual environments, HughesNet leaned into its long-standing relationship with 4-H to develop high-quality, at-home learning STEM resources to supplement virtual K-12 curriculum. Digitized e-learning and at-home classes challenged educators’ ability to keep students engaged. HughesNet and 4-H sought to help educators overcome this barrier and support efforts by inspiring students with highly engaging, hands-on activities they could do from the safety of their own homes.

This came to life via continued acceleration and diversification of content produced and promoted on the 4-H at Home education platform. From utilizing materials around the house, to finding new activities within the digital ecosystem, HughesNet and 4-H were able to effectively build upon the work established at the onset of pandemic when 4-H at Home was launched. Relying on internet education also led to analog solutions that merge the digital and physical such as digital binary coding bracelets that allow kids to learn the basics of coding while creating art.

At the end of the day, HughesNet-sponsored content on 4-H at Home united high-quality resources with universal availability to supplement at-home curriculum with engaging learning projects and a virtual community of peers and positive adult mentors (a STEM communitas!).

**Program Description and Results:**

As the country managed against ever-changing expectations on how to best navigate the pandemic, 4-H similarly found itself needing to evolve and seek new ways to reach the next generation of leaders in a digital-first environment. This resulted in perpetual innovation of the 4-H at Home platform through the development of new content to match the new needs of youth, who lacked the in-person experiences to which they were accustomed.

To aid this evolution, in 2021—a year into the pandemic, as well as a year following the launch of [4-H at Home](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/)—HughesNet fed the 4-H at Home content hub with a series of new online STEM Lab activities, engaging students, parents and educators to meet their increased needs and preference for digital experiences. This included the introduction of activities such as [Code Your Communication](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/code-your-communication/), [Wonderful Wetlands](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/wonderful-wetlands/), [Science Bug: Electrical Circuits](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/science-bug/), [Slippery Stuff: Dancing Pepper](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/slippery-stuff-dancing-pepper/)—each generating thousands of views and new users.

At the onset of 2022, HughesNet-sponsored STEM Lab efforts once again set a new standard for 4-H at Home, generating content under a wholly new immersive experience. Launched in February during National Engineer’s Week, the [HughesNet and 4-H Space Exploration Experience](https://4-h.org/about/4-h-at-home/space-exploration/) was the first-ever piece of 4-H at Home programming that shifted beyond one-off activities to an all-digital, comprehensive learning management system.

Through the Space Exploration experience, students in grade levels 3-8 were able to learn via interactive videos about a range of topics through the lens of a virtual astronaut.e. This program provides a host of virtual experiences young people and their families can learn from, such as the logistics of growing food in space, building a lunar terrain vehicle, collecting terrain samples, and understanding the role of satellites in connecting the unconnected. Complementing this experience during National Engineers Week, HughesNet promoted the importance of technical education and careers in engineering, math, and science.

Supporting these company commitments and efforts, Hughes launched a robust public relations and social media campaign that complemented the communications efforts of 4-H to draw in new users.

The Hughes and 4-H nationwide campaigns in 2021 and 2022 resulted in high engagement and strong visibility, as noted by these successes:

* A 24% increase in 4-H at Home traffic, year-over-year
* 703,150 visits to 4-H at Home
* 62,345 unique visits to HughesNet Rural STEM Lab activity pages
* 72% of visitors to HughesNet 4-H at Home STEM Lab activities were rurally located, a key demographic in need of access STEM resources
* Social posts reached 901,800 Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram users
* Social activity generated 57,118 social media engagements—a 90% increase year-over-year

Additionally, the pioneering programming that led the shift to a comprehensive learning management system—the HughesNet and 4-H Space Exploration Experience—drove 14,812 sessions in just two weeks and social activity of more than 150,000 engagements.

In summary, HughesNet’s extensive support of 4-H at Home:

* Inspired the next generation of STEM leaders by getting youth involved in STEM activities
* Increased awareness of and access to STEM activities nationwide
* Supported STEM project-based learning and career exploration
* Improved HughesNet brand sentiment through 4-H partner activations and engagement with 4-Hers

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