

Help Choosing Broadband

So you've decided to move with the times, ditch dial-up and get broadband. All you have to do now is choose a provider and you can surf away to your heart's content. Being the frugal customer that you are, you decide to shop around to find the very best price only to discover that there are about as many choices as there are stars in the sky. Every company appears to offer the lowest price and fastest speed. It is quite tempting to choose at random and just be done with it, but a few minutes spent thinking about what you really need can eliminate several choices as well as help you get the best price.

The first thing you need to do is think realistically about the way in which you use the internet. Your answer will help you determine what sort of bandwidth you require, which will really help to narrow your choices. Here are a few examples.

Doris is a lone parent with a three small children. She uses the Internet primarily to do her shopping, email friends, pay bills and download a few songs now and again.

Harry is a young professional who is completely at ease with using the Internet for just about anything, whether it be to book holidays, reserve cinema and gig tickets, access online banking and bills or find the capital of Madagascar. He has an extensive MP3 collection but prefers to watch film in DVD format on his home theatre.

Jayne is a university student and shares a broadband connection with her housemates via a router. When she gets home, she chats constantly to her friends both in the UK and abroad via Instant Messenger whilst downloading all the latest MP3s. Jayne is a film fanatic and downloads the latest releases on a regular basis.

Elijah is 17 years old and devotes every spare moment to playing computer games with his friends over the internet. He has an MP3 collection of over 3000 songs and film library that would put Blockbuster to shame. His mother, Shaz, says that both Elijah and his brother are intravenously connected to their computers. When she can get a few minutes, Shaz likes to shop online, book holidays and download films. Her husband likes to find out the cricket and rugby scores and occasionally books surprise weekends away for his wife.

It is quite likely that none of these profiles will fit you exactly but it should give you something to work from when deciding on the type of user you are. Things you will have to contend with, aside from the amount bandwidth you purchase, include download caps, pay-as-you-go or flat rate service and overall quality of service from your provider.

Doris for example, uses the internet about 5 hours a week. With such minimal use, a pay-as-you-go package with a fairly hefty download cap would be appropriate and give Doris the service she needs at an extremely low price.

With his MP3 collection, Harry is a heavier user than Doris but certainly nowhere as demanding as Elijah's family. If he was careful, Harry could also benefit from pay-as-you-go and a download cap but a flat rate service would likely be more convenient since having to keep track of every second online doesn't really suit. Harry is online often but usually to complete a specific task rather than surfing aimlessly and downloading large amounts of material. A download cap could help keep the costs down but buying extra credits if the cap is exceeded or having to wait until the next month to download could end up being both expensive and annoying.

Jayne and her housemates will experience the best service if they pay a flat monthly fee for a package that has a large amount of bandwidth and no download cap. Because each of their housemates has a computer, there is always a lot of down and up loading happening. Trying to keep track of who did what would be next to impossible and would likely cause an avoidable falling-out. Large bandwidth is necessary to make sure all users enjoy a simultaneous fast connection.

Elijah and his family are very heavy internet users. In order for the connection to always be fast enough for simultaneous online gaming and movie downloads, the very largest bandwidth available is necessary. This can be quite expensive but it is really the only way to accommodate such a high demand.

Providing a broadband service is a fairly hands-off business but it is worth investigating your prospective provider's customer service record. After the initial setup, it is unlikely that you will have any real need to be in contact with your provider. It is better to be safe than sorry in this case, however. If something does go wrong or you have a question, it could mean the difference between getting a helpful, timely answer and spending an hour of your life lost in the depths of an automated customer service system.