



5 Points to Consider When Choosing an Internet Service Provider

CONTENTS

1. How to Evaluate Your Existing and Potential Suppliers
2. Facts About Hosting
3. Differences Between ADSL and SDSL
4. A Typical Service Level Agreement
5. Voice over IP

HOW TO EVALUATE EXISTING AND POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS

Questions to Ask

- What sort of deal do we have (simple Internet access, Broadband, unmetered access, leased line)?
- What fees are we paying?
- What extras are we getting (how many e-mail addresses, any free hosting etc)?
- What sort of phone line would we be better off with – could a leased line save us money in the long run?

Most people say there's nothing to choose between any two Internet Service Providers (ISPs), but there is. Much like the hosting business, Internet Service Providers are battling away to attract customers and you can use this to your advantage.

An ISP that offers services exclusively to businesses may charge more for subscription than one that is consumer-based, but for that extra money you should get a better level of service, a more reliable connection or faster access speeds. That's certainly what some companies find. Usually companies set up with a BT ISDN line, and then they need something a bit more substantial, which is why they upgrade to ADSL or a leased line. Companies have to have good access for e-mail and the transfer of large documents.

The correct choice of ISP and connection speed is crucial not just to serving your company's clientele, but also in enabling the business to grow. The move to ADSL certainly enables your company to expand in terms of numbers so that it will allow your company to grow the business, which in turn has increased revenue.

Don't be talked into over-reaching yourself by an ISP's sales person. To start with the ISDN is not bad at all, you know why you need to upgrade, but you certainly don't need to leap feet first into a broadband solution. There's no point in going for the latest whizz-bang technology just for the hell of it.

You can save money by knowing exactly what sort of capacity you need. And if you don't need to grow for a while, don't be tempted to pay for

HOW TO EVALUATE EXISTING AND POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS

extra bandwidth needlessly. ISPs can sting you with special one-off set-up fees, which increase with the level of the service. If you're having ISDN or ADSL installed, there will be quite a lot of up-front costs. If you move offices you'll probably have to pay them all over again. So if you are moving offices soon, ask yourself: can your upgrade wait until then?

Also try to find out exactly what you're getting for your money. Make sure you are aware of what the ISP is capable of guaranteeing you and what the carrier is capable of. You can save some money if your ISP also does hosting.

Finally ask questions specifically relevant to your business. What is the maximum size of e-mail you need to send? Most ISPs will let you send files up to one, two or three Megs. If you're working with pictures, publishing files, etc – then your file size will be much bigger.

FACTS ABOUT HOSTING

Questions to ask

- Do we need a server all to ourselves or can we get away with sharing one?
- If we have our own server, does it need to be secure for online payments?
- How much traffic are we expecting on our site and does the amount of transfer we have match this?
- What added extras does our hosting company offer us? And could we get more elsewhere?

For mid-sized companies with minimal transfer (the amount of information you can send or receive online), hosting is a big money-saving opportunity. Okay, a large web site that attracts thousands of visitors a day will probably need a dedicated server and a fair amount of transfer. But if your site is smaller and attracts a handful of users per day, you can scale down your hosting requirements to a shared or virtual server and decrease the amount of transfer. First, get several quotes from hosting companies. Try your web design agency as it may well have cut a preferential deal with a hosting company by buying space and transfer in bulk. It may be able to offer you savings as a reseller of that space.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADSL AND SDSL

ADSL

ADSL stands for Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. This means that the speed to upload information is different to the speed to download information. Typically, speeds vary between 512kbps to 8Mbps downstream and up to 768kbps upstream.

The other thing to consider with ADSL is the contention ratio, which can vary from 5:1 and 50:1. This is the number of subscribers which are sharing the same service locally to yourself. Consequently, if you have a 2 Meg connection but there are 20 other users on the same 2 Meg connections, then you will only get 100kbps as a speed. This is something to carefully consider when choosing ADSL. ADSL is obviously much cheaper than SDSL.

SDSL

SDSL stands for Symmetric Digital Subscriber Line and is a Broadband service where the speed is the same whether you upload or download. Typical speeds are between 512kbps and 2Mbps and this is also contended but contention ratios can vary between 5:1 and 10:1. This obviously gives much more bandwidth available. Some ISP's have their own provision for SDSL whereas the majority sell a re-branded British Telecom Service.

SDSL is suitable for home workers and sites where contention and speed are not important. SDSL is ideal for businesses that require high speeds, synchronise access for connecting sites together using a VPN (Virtual, Private, Network) or from site hosting of web content and Voice over IP. These requirements are where the bandwidth needs to be the same both up and downstream.

A TYPICAL SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Normal Care

- Service guarantee: n/a
- Front-line support: During business hours (09:00-17:00; Monday – Friday)
- Second line support: Target response during next business day
- Target repair lead-time: End of next business day
- Line protection: optional ISDN back-up option
- Service credits: none

Through local loop unbundling, Easynet has full control over the end-to-end connection from the customer premises to the Internet peering point. This enables Easynet to fully manage the availability of the IP services that it delivers via DSL-based technologies and hence offer enhanced service level cover for these services

Total Care Pack

- Service guarantee: defined service levels with credits
- Front-line support: 24 x 7
- Second line support: Target response within four working hours of initial call
- Target repair lead-time: Within five working hours of second line call-back
- Line protection: optional ISDN back-up option
- Service credits: as outlined below

A TYPICAL SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Service Credits

Under the Total Care Pack, credits are accrued for service outages for reported faults over 12 working hours as follows:

- Applied retrospectively on a per-quarter basis
- Calculated based on standard quarterly charge for the service in use
- Credited as a discount against the subsequent rental period
- 1 day's credit accumulated for each hour or part thereof over the threshold
- During any 24-hour period – maximum of one day's credit
- During any quarter, maximum credit of 25% of quarterly charges

Service level cover excludes scheduled maintenance where:

- Minimum 72 hours notice has been given
- Downtime during the scheduled maintenance window: Wednesday 02:00-05:00

VOICE OVER IP (VoIP)

Voice over IP or VoIP stands for Voice Over Internet Protocol and is a technology where voice is converted into data packets and transported along with data on the same circuits. There are three uses for Voice over IP.

The first one of these is between two sites where two sites with dissimilar telephone systems can be connected and calls can be transferred at no cost between the two sites. Ideal for sites that have branch operations connected to a head office.

The second sort of Voice over IP is on the Local Area Network where the telephone and computer share the same CAT5 point and both are plugged into the cabling together. This enables cabling costs to be reduced and quite often enables a common programming methodology for both the telephones and the IT and is consequently appealing to IT managers.

The third sort of Voice over IP is where a head office connects to remote workers at home using Broadband technology. This enables the remote salesperson or engineer to dial into the office access there email and diary along with being able to connect to other applications. Different types of circuits are needed for each type of Voice over IP. Typically, site-to-site would use SDSL technology, site to home worker would use SDSL for main head office and ADSL for the home worker and Local Area Network does not require circuits as it's on the same site.

Considerations with regard to implementing any of these apply to the service level agreement from the Internet Service Provider to ensure that the quality of service is provided between sites. This is not always easy to obtain from ISP's and organisations should ask the telecoms or data supplier of the requirements or alternatively ask the data or telephone system supplier to supply the circuit as it then ensures accountability for any solution that is implemented.

ABOUT ACTIMAX

Actimax, established in 1997 has a firm track record of proven results and satisfied customers in the telecommunications market. Our core business is the supply, installation and maintenance of communications systems, and our strength is in the technical background of our team of 38 employees.

With a management team that have worked together for a combined total of over 75 years, we are a hard working company that knows where it is heading. The experience of John Massey Managing Director who's background in the communications industry goes back over 30 years is invaluable in the company being one step ahead of the competition. Actimax invests over 50k per annum on training it's team, including technical engineering courses, management courses, sales and marketing seminars and we also recently offered Learn Direct courses to the whole company, which saw a good up take. The company ethos is to keep our team, happy, motivated and interested, that way they are more likely to stay with us. This has proved to be a benefit with 60% of our team having been with us for over 3 years,

We provide communications hardware from five leading manufacturers along with a whole portfolio of supporting products. We have gained superior accreditation with all of the suppliers we work with, along with awards for Customer Care and Service (2004 and 2005) , Comms Channel Reseller of the Year 2005, Essex Business of the Year 2005 and Business to Business winner 2005.

Our target market are companies, either single or multisites with over 20 employees, and with no upper limit. Our market sector is any company looking to improve their process and procedures along with increase in sales, cutting costs and improving service, and we have been especially successful in Government, Financial, Travel and the Motor Trade.

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