



## SECOND TIME LUCKY WITH NTL

Ordering **NTL Home Broadband 600Kbps** online was no problem for Andy Boyd, but installation was another matter entirely. The two engineers who came to install the hardware didn't lay the cable neatly and didn't even clear up the mess that they made.

Andy installed the software himself and

thought the instructions gave clear advice on how to connect the modem to the PC. However, he couldn't figure out how to upgrade his existing NTL dial-up account and, in the end, this took him an hour.

Two days later Andy turned on his PC and found that there wasn't any internet connection. Another

engineer was called out and said that the first installation hadn't been carried out properly.

NTL says that installation is quick and easy for the vast majority of its customers. It's apologised to Andy and says it's taken the matter very seriously and has spoken to the third-party contractor involved.

you can install broadband yourself by running a cable between your set-top box and computer or request that an engineer does.

**Contention ratios** The speed at which both ADSL and cable broadband operates is affected by the number of people using a single local connection at the same time. The maximum speeds quoted by service providers will be achieved only when there's one active user. The speed of your connection will vary depending on how many people are online. Some broadband services place a limit on the number of people able to use a single connection, which is known as the contention ratio. Residential services are most commonly capped at 50:1, which means that you'll never share a connection with more than 50 other people.

## WHO CAN GET IT

Converting existing phone lines and cables to provide broadband has taken time and broadband still isn't available to everyone; 43 per cent of UK homes can receive cable broadband and 71 per cent of UK homes are served by an ADSL-enabled exchange. However, 6 per cent of people at each exchange won't be able to get broadband because technical limitations mean that you must live within 5.5km of the exchange to receive the service. As part of BT's aim to extend ADSL to 90 per cent of homes, it's running a web-based registration scheme for people who can't get ADSL but would like it. BT has set trigger levels of users for some of its exchanges. When enough users register their interest, it converts the exchange. So far BT has upgraded 220 exchanges as a result of the scheme, and another 300 have hit trigger levels and are due to be

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PROVIDERS	AOL	BT Openworld	Demon	FairBroadband	Freedom2Surf	Freemove	Nildram	NTL	Ona.Tel	Telewest Broadband	Tiscali
Package	AOL Broadband	Home 500 Plug & Go	Demon Express Total	Home User	ADSL Pure IP Home User	Freemove Broadband	Home 500 Lite	ntl home 600K broadband internet	Unplugged 500u	Blueyonder Broadband 512	Tiscali Broad Plus
Monthly cost (£)	27.99	29.99	24.99	18.99	22.50	27.99	22.99	24.99	27.99	29.99 <sup>1</sup>	27
Minimum contract term	12 months	12 months	12 months	3 months	1 month	12 months	12 months <sup>2</sup>	12 months	1 month	12 months	12 mo
Installation	1▷ self	self <sup>3</sup>	self	self	self	self	self	self and engineer <sup>4</sup>	self	self and engineer <sup>5</sup>	self
Activation fee (£)	free	free	free	58	70.49 <sup>6</sup>	free	58.75	free <sup>7</sup>	30	50	50.00
Equipment cost (£)	2▷ 25 <sup>8</sup>	50 <sup>9</sup>	59.99	69.99	82.24	49.99	51.11	free	49.99	free	free <sup>10</sup>
Capped contention ratio	3▷ no	50:1	50:1	50:1	no	no	50:1	No	50:1	no	no
Daily transfer limits	4▷ no	no	no	no	no	no	no	1Gb per day	no	no	no
Web space	5▷ 20Mb <sup>12</sup>	50Mb	20Mb	none	20Mb	30Mb	none	55Mb	none	30Mb	100Mb
Email accounts	7	10	113	10	20	113	15	15	113	314	6
Cost of telephone support	free	local rate	local rate	national rate <sup>15</sup>	standard rate <sup>16</sup>	national rate	national rate	local rate	national rate	local rate	national rate
Macintosh compatible	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes <sup>18</sup>





upgraded. Visit [www.bt.com/broadband](http://www.bt.com/broadband) to find out what's happening in your area.

For people who don't have the option of switching to ADSL or cable, another option is satellite broadband. It can be received anywhere in the UK. There are a small number of residential services offering reasonably priced one-way satellite broadband links. One-way means that data is downloaded at broadband speeds via satellite, but a dial-up ISP is used to provide a link back to the internet (see 'Broadband via satellite', May 2003, p57).

## CHOOSING A PROVIDER

There are more than 100 companies offering business and residential broadband services in the UK. Many are existing ISPs that have expanded their services to include self-install ADSL. But plenty of new companies have arrived on the scene, too. We've looked at the costs and services of a selection to give an idea of how they vary (see 'Providers', below). All of these use BT's ADSL infrastructure to supply broadband, except for NTL and Telewest, which provide cable broadband.

Most broadband services offer the same features as a traditional ISP, such as email addresses and web space. There are a number of other factors to consider when choosing a broadband service.

Monthly subscription charges range from around £19 to £30 and set-up costs can also vary a great deal. Of the providers we've looked at, line activation can be anything from free to £75, and equipment costs from free to £85. Look out for special offers reducing these fixed costs.

Many services have a minimum contract length of 12 months,

but contracts of three months or less are available. Sometimes a reduced term is available for an increased monthly fee.

Most ADSL services are self-install, which means that you connect the equipment and install the necessary software. BT offers engineer installation, but, if you take this option, activation costs £250 instead of being free. Cable broadband can be self- or engineer-installed.

1 £25 if you have phone line as well 2 Three-month contract costs £29.99 per month 3 Engineer installation available, but activation costs £250 4 Self-installation available only to digital TV customers. Engineer-installation available to all customers 5 Self-installation available to digital TV customers using a PC, not a Mac. Engineer installation available to all customers 6 Fee waived if contract kept for 12 months 7 Free until 31 August, £50 for existing customers and £75 for new customers thereafter 8 Free to existing AOL

members. Free to new users later this year 9 Free until 30 June, £80 thereafter 10 Special offer, usually £65 11 £49.99 from 1 July 12 20MB per email account, 140MB in total. 13 Unlimited email addresses available for delivery into one inbox 14 Each account has up to five separate addresses 15 Calls outside office hours charged at £1 per minute 16 Standard cost of calls to the 01727 area code 17 Local rate calls available for monthly fee of £5.99 18 Full support not available to Mac users 19 Online registration not Mac compatible

## Virgin

### Virgin.net Broadband

24.99

1 month self

free

59.99<sup>11</sup>

50:1

10Mb

5

50p/minute<sup>17</sup>

yes<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

All broadband services shown offer a maximum download speed of around 500Kbps. Some companies offer services at higher and lower speeds. 1 Installation All of the ADSL packages shown are self-install except where indicated. Both cable services can be either self- or engineer-installed. 2 Equipment cost The cost of equipment includes a USB modem and at least one microfilter. You'll need one microfilter for

each phone socket in use in your house, even if you're not linking a computer to each of them. 3 Capped contention ratio The limit placed on the number of users accessing a connection at once. 4 Daily transfer limits The maximum amount of data that you can download or upload in 24 hours. 5 Web space The amount of web space that is provided to be used to host your own website, for instance. Correct at June 2003

## THUMBS UP FOR TISCALI

Mandy Morrison was amazed at how easy it was to order and install Tiscali Broadband 256Kbps. She was particularly pleased that, after she placed her order online, she was emailed regularly with updates about her order status. 'I felt that I was being dealt with efficiently and was confident of my order being delivered within the time

specified,' she says. And it took her only ten minutes to install the equipment. Her main concern was the cost of technical assistance. Originally, she was told she'd need to call a premium rate number, but at 50p per minute she felt this was far too expensive. After some perseverance, she was told she could also call 0870 744

2922, a national rate call number, to receive technical assistance. This number was not given on the contacts page of Tiscali's website, so we contacted it to find out why. Tiscali confirmed that its broadband customers can use this number to get technical assistance and says that this number will now appear on its website.

Support It's also worth considering the cost of telephone support when making your choice. Sometimes this is free, but it can be as much as £1 per minute.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

NTL is the only broadband provider that we've looked at which places a restriction on the amount you can download each day. It limits its customers to 1 Gigabyte (GB) of data a day, which is equivalent to about 100 software programs, 200 music tracks or 10,000 pictures. So it should be enough for most home users. But broadband could increasingly become a victim of its own success. As people in the UK realise its potential and start to use it more, we might see an increased number of providers shift away from the current unmetered packages and impose download limits on customers.

Telewest Broadband has launched a 2Mbps service. Faster services like this are likely to become more common. In South Korea, for example, 21 per cent of the population has broadband (compared with 3 per cent in the UK), and services of up to 10Mbps are available.