



How you use your broadband*



Broadband for all

With broadband expected to be available to the whole UK by 2012, Which? reveals the Best Buy service providers

Can't get broadband because of where you live? Or maybe you have broadband, but it's so slow you might as well be using two cans and a length of string? If, like many Which? members, you want to take part in a wide range of web activities, such as watching video clips and downloading software, a below-par internet speed can make your online experience frustrating.

But it looks as if the UK won't be stuck in the broadband slow lane for long. The government has announced plans to bring broadband with an up-to-2Mbps minimum speed within reach of

the whole UK, as part of its plans for a Digital Britain (see opposite).

Pick a broadband winner

If you can get broadband but are frustrated by poor service and reliability, don't despair. Our latest survey reveals four Best Buy home broadband providers – Zen Internet, O2, Utility Warehouse and Be. In our previous

survey, only two internet service providers (ISPs) made the grade.

Our research found a big gap between Best Buys and their nearest rivals. Waitrose scored 68% – a drop of nearly 10% from its September 2008 rating. Plusnet (68%) and Greenbee (67%) join it as runners up.

We found that the UK's four biggest ISPs don't impress. BT, TalkTalk and Virgin Media all hover around the 50% mark, while Tiscali languishes as a Which? Don't Buy, scoring 39%.

Check how your ISP did using our Best Buy and Don't Buy summaries plus our full results table on p63. If you're looking for mobile broadband, you'll find the results of our survey at www.which.co.uk/mobilebroadband.

OUR RESEARCH

Best Buys must have a Which? customer score of 80% or more and do well on

other measures, including reliability and customer service. Don't Buys have a Which? customer score of

less than 40%. In May 2009, 11,431 Which? online panel members told us about their broadband experiences.

Expert view

UK-wide broadband access

Which? broadband expert Ceri Stanaway explains plans for the future of broadband in the UK



Broadband started taking off around 10 years ago – and with it came the concept of the internet ‘digital divide’. Because broadband companies invest in profitable metropolitan areas first, some communities have been left behind as broadband technologies improved.

Recently, prices have fallen and speeds increased to 20Mbps or higher, with Virgin Media piloting speeds of up to 200Mbps. This has heralded an age where downloading TV shows in minutes (see our Top Gear chart, below) is commonplace.

But if you live in a rural area that lacks broadband investment, you may be being left behind by ISPs busy concentrating on urban areas. You’ll usually pay more for slower broadband, while in some areas, still reliant on dial-up internet access, downloading that Top Gear episode would take more than a day.

Nationwide broadband access

According to the government’s Digital Britain report, 11% of UK homes can’t get broadband speeds of 2Mbps, and some locations can’t get broadband at all.

In order to tackle this, the government proposes creating a nationwide broadband infrastructure that provides up-to-2Mbps broadband access to all by 2012. The scheme will be funded by a mix of public and private investment – including around £200m underspend from the Digital Switchover Help Scheme – into upgrading existing networks.

How speed will be improved

For some with poor or no access to broadband – particularly those that live far from their telephone exchange – phone lines will be upgraded as part of the proposal. Priority will be given to those who can’t get broadband.

Poor broadband speeds can be caused by home wiring problems – you can try to resolve this using self-help solutions such as BT’s Broadband Accelerator (see www.bt.com), but some will need the assistance of an engineer to resolve.

Is 2Mbps good enough?

Some industry experts argue that 2Mbps is already outdated – and recent research suggests UK broadband consumers receive average speeds of 4.1Mbps. You can see how this varies by provider at www.which.co.uk/broadbandspeed.

But a reliable 2Mbps compares favourably to no broadband and should be plenty, unless you’re a heavy broadband user. It’s fast enough to use popular internet services such as BBC iPlayer.

And it isn’t just about speed. Which? survey respondents say that a reliable connection is as important as speed. Advertised speeds should be viewed in the context of ISPs’ small print – most have policies that might limit speeds at certain times or for heavy use.

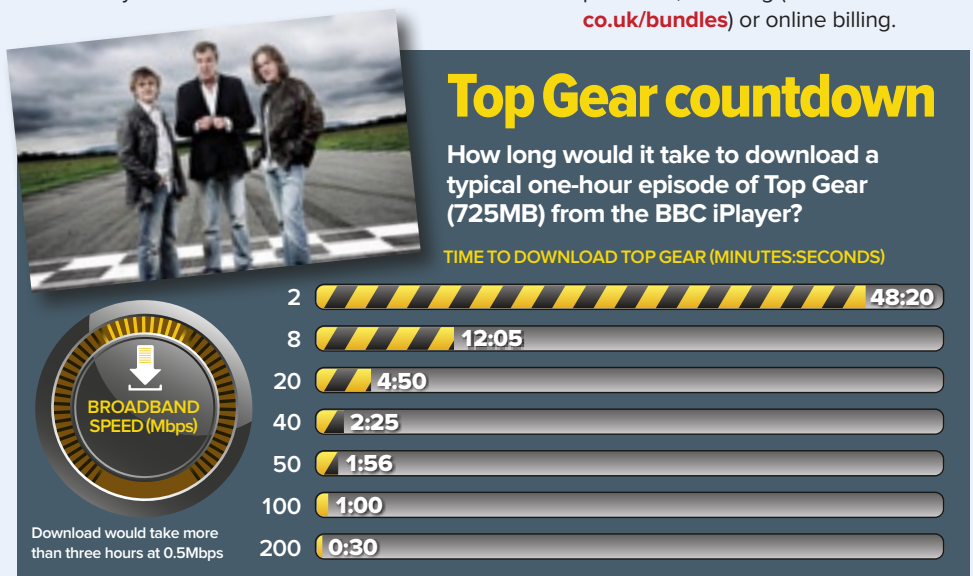
Customer service levels, usage limits and how well an ISP deals with problems are all key too, so use the full range of Which? advice when making your choice.

Superfast broadband for all?

BT has announced plans to bring up to 40Mbps broadband access to 10 million homes by 2012 – but that’s only 40% of the UK. The government says it’s concerned that if investment in broadband networks is left to market forces, many areas will be left behind.

It wants investment in broadband’s ‘next generation access’ to ensure it’s available to the whole country. To fund this, the government is likely to levy a 50p a month supplement on all fixed phone lines as a ‘national investment’ in broadband’s future. Low-income households on social telephony schemes would be exempt.

If you’re concerned about the impact on your phone bills, look for other ways to save, such as switching providers, bundling (see www.which.co.uk/bundles) or online billing.





Pushing your limits

The way you use the internet affects the monthly broadband cap you need

You can see on p60 how Which? members like to use the internet, but how does this type of online activity match up to your monthly broadband usage limits? Do you really need an unlimited deal, or would a capped service be more than adequate?

Below, we show how much typical usage of a range of different activities eats into your broadband usage limit, and give you a running total if you want to see how it all adds up. You may be surprised at how low a cap you really need – especially if you don't watch online TV or download movies.

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU USE?

	TYPICAL WEEKLY USE ^a	MONTHLY USAGE (GB) ^b	RUNNING TOTAL (GB) ^c
Surf the web	7 hours	0.54	0.54
Send/receive emails ^d	50 emails	0.22	0.76
Download software updates	1 update	<0.01	0.77
Watch short video clips	3 clips	0.06	0.83
Download applications	<1 application	0.07	0.90
Download/upload photos	5 photos	0.06	0.96
Watch online TV	1 hour	1.56	2.52
Listen to online radio	1 hour	0.25	2.77
Download music	1 track	0.02	2.79
Make internet phone calls	1 hour	0.06	2.85
Play games online	3 hours	0.39	3.24
Download movies	1 movie	7.17	10.41

a Typical usage of the members who responded to our survey and said they did this online activity. Your usage may be higher or lower
b Assumes a 31-day month. Data usage for each task calculated based on assumptions around average usage. Where relevant, we assume market leaders are used – eg iTunes for music downloads, or iPlayer for watching online TV. Our calculations include some rounding up or down and should be regarded as a rough guide. **c** Adds each activity cumulatively – if you don't do some of the tasks, deduct them from the running total. **d** 10 with large (5MB) attachments and 40 without



Zen Internet

Customer score 87%

A Best Buy since 2005, Zen deserves its excellent

customer service reputation. It scores the maximum five stars for everything but value for money, with packages starting at £17.61 for a 5GB cap. For most Which? members, Zen's 'marvellous customer support', reliable connection and willingness to go 'the extra mile' to resolve problems are worth paying more for. You also like its one-month contracts – Zen relies on service quality rather than lengthy tie-ins to keep customers.



Utility Warehouse

Customer score 81%

Despite scoring a respectable 72% overall in September 2008, Utility Warehouse deserves praise for not resting on its laurels. Instead, it has continually worked to improve, and as a result it's hit the standards required of a Which? broadband Best Buy for the first time. Utility Warehouse offers standalone broadband from £18 a month, or as a bundle with home phone – you can add energy services too. See www.which.co.uk/bundles for more.



O2

Customer score 85%

Despite its relatively recent entry to the broadband market in late 2007, O2 home broadband impresses with five-star ratings across the board, including value for money, connection reliability and customer service. Which? members also liked O2's freephone technical support line. Standalone broadband is reasonably priced, starting at £12.23 for an unlimited, up-to-8Mbps service on a 12-month contract. O2 mobile customers get £4.89 off their monthly broadband fee.



Be

Customer score 80%

Be was one of the first ISPs to offer up to 24Mbps in selected areas as far back as 2005, when BT's standard offering was just 2Mbps. A Best Buy in our September 2008 survey, Be was relegated from our broadband premier league in March 2009, but has regained its place. Be's efficient technical support was highlighted for praise by several members. Its cheapest up-to-24Mbps service costs £17.50 for an uncapped, 12-month contract – it also has a cheaper up-to-8Mbps service.



DON'T BUYS

As in our last survey, AOL, Karoo, Orange and Pipex are Which? Don't Buys. Disappointingly, Tiscali now joins them.

No Don't Buy ISP scores more than three stars for any rating, and AOL, Orange, Pipex and Tiscali all get just one star for customer service.

Keep an eye on www.which.co.uk/broadband in early 2009 to see if TalkTalk's recent purchase of Tiscali affects its performance in our next survey.



Contacts

Be
0808 101 3424
www.bethere.co.uk

BT 0800 085 7343
www.bt.com

Greenbee
0800 916 6805
www.greenbee.com

O2 0800 230 0202
<http://broadband.o2.co.uk>

Plusnet 0114 296 5198
www.plus.net

TalkTalk
0800 049 7802
www.talktalk.co.uk

Tiscali 020 3302 8416
www.tiscali.co.uk

Utility Warehouse
020 8955 5998
www.utilitywarehouse.co.uk

Virgin Media
0800 953 5353
www.virginmedia.com

Waitrose 0800 013 2282
www.waitrose.com

Zen Internet 01706 902000
www.zen.co.uk

Ofcom (telecoms regulator)
0300 123 3333
www.ofcom.org.uk

ISP	COSTS AND FEATURES							WHICH? RATINGS				SCORE
(sample size)	PACKAGE	MONTHLY COST (£)	SPEED (Mbps)	USAGE CAP (GB)	TIE-IN (MONTHS)	FREE EQUIPMENT	LINE ACTIVATION (£)	VALUE FOR MONEY	CONNECTION SPEED	CONNECTION RELIABILITY	CUSTOMER SERVICE	WHICH? CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
ZEN INTERNET (190)	8000 Lite	17.61	8	5	1	N	47	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	87
O2 (196)	Standard (LLU)	12.23 ^a	8	NL	12	W	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	85
O2 (196)	Access (non-LLU)	22.02 ^a	8	NL	12	W	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	85
UTILITY WAREHOUSE (104)	Standard	19.72 ^b	8	40	see ^c	M	n/a	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	81
BE (70)	Value	13.50	8	NL	12	W	n/a	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	80
PLUSNET (588)	Value (low cost area)	5.99 ^d	8	10	18	W	n/a	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	68
PLUSNET (588)	Value (non-low cost)	11.99	8	10	18	W	n/a	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	68
WAITROSE (594)	Broadband	18.58	8	5	12	M	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	68
GREENBEE (45)	Broadband	17.61	8	5	12	M	n/a	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	67
NILDRAM (56)	Lite2Go	13.23	8	1	3	N	40 ^e	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	64
ECLIPSE (122)	Home Lite	9.95	8 ^f	2	1	N	46 ^e	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	63
MADASAFISH (114)	Max	14.65 ^d	8	5	12	W	n/a	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	60
SKY (461)	Mid (LLU)	10.00 ^{a,g}	10	10	12	W	n/a ^h	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	59
SKY (461)	Connect (non-LLU)	17.00 ^g	8	40	12	W	n/a ^h	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	59
CLARANET (33)	Max Home Offpeak	17.61	8	NL ^j	12	N	58	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	56
DEMON (186)	Home 8000 ^k	18.98	8	NL	12	R	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	54
UK ONLINE (34)	Pro	19.99	8	NL	12	N	n/a	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	52
VIRGIN MEDIA (2,361)	Size L (cable)	20.00 ^{a,d}	10	NL	12	W	30	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	51
VIRGIN MEDIA (2,361)	Size M (non-cable)	15.00 ^a	20	10	12	W	30	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	51
TALK TALK (842)	Essentials (LLU)	6.49 ^m	8	40	18	W	30	★★★★	★★	★★	★★	49
TALK TALK (842)	Essentials (non-LLU)	21.49 ^m	8	40	18	W	30	★★★★	★★	★★	★★	49
BT (2,463)	Option 1	15.65	8 ⁿ	10	12	W	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	48
TESCO (71)	2Mb broadband	19.55	2 ^p	10	12	M	n/a	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	48
FREEDOM2SURF (134)	Lite	13.70	8	10	3	N	46 ^e	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	46
TISCALI (752)	Broadband Only	14.99	8	NL	12	M	n/a	★★★★	★★	★★	★	39
KAROO (40)	Lite ^r	12.72 ^d	24	2	18	R	29	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	38
PIPEX (288)	Lite	16.68	16	25	3	N	46 ^e	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★	36
ORANGE (434)	Home Starter (LLU)	9.79 ^a	8	10	18	W	n/a	★★	★★	★★★★	★	32
ORANGE (434)	Home Starter (non-LLU)	17.62 ^a	8	10	18	W	n/a	★★	★★	★★★★	★	32
AOL (750)	Wireless Flexi (LLU)	14.99 ^{a,d}	8	10	1	W	30	★★	★	★	★	31
AOL (750)	Wireless Flexi (non-LLU)	19.99 ^{a,d}	8	10	1	W	30	★★	★	★	★	31

We list the cheapest package (standalone where available) with a speed of 8Mbps or higher (where possible) from each ISP for which we had 30 or more responses. Local loop unbundled (LLU) areas, where ISPs install their own equipment in BT exchanges, may get faster/cheaper broadband. Go to www.which.co.uk/broadband for more ratings and packages. ^a Discounts may apply if you have another service with the same company ^b Includes membership fee ^c £50 cancellation fee applies within 12 months ^d Discounts applies for first 3-6 months ^e No fee for customers switching from another service ^f Up to 24Mbps in LLU areas ^g Subject to minimum £16.50 TV contract ^h Minimum £15 installation cost for TV box ^j Usage before 6pm weekdays on pay-as-you-go basis ^k Cheaper 24Mbps package available in some areas ^m Part of bundle with phone calls and line rental for £17.74, or £32.74 outside LLU areas ⁿ Up to 20Mbps in certain areas ^p Does not offer higher than 2Mbps ^r Available only in areas covered by Kingston Communications

USING THE TABLE

Costs and features

Monthly cost Correct at August 2009. Excludes short-term offers

Speed The maximum advertised

speed Usage cap Amount that can be downloaded or uploaded per month. NL = no limit **Tie-in** Where there is a choice, we have chosen a one-month contract **Free equipment**

M = modem; N = none; R = router; W = wireless router.

Which? ratings

Star ratings Represent how highly Which? members rated

providers for each aspect. The more stars the better.

Which? customer score

Combines overall satisfaction with provider and likelihood of recommending to a friend.