

# Online for free

The free broadband offers from Orange, TalkTalk and Sky look tempting, but should you sign up?

**Y**ou can't easily avoid adverts from Orange, Sky or TalkTalk promoting their 'free' broadband deals.

But is it really free? To qualify, you must pay a monthly fee for another service. With Orange that's a pay-monthly mobile tariff worth £30 or more. Sky offers free broadband only to Sky TV subscribers paying £15 or more a month. And free broadband pioneer, TalkTalk, requires you to sign up to its Talk3 call package at £20 a month – including line rental. On top, Sky charges a £40 broadband activation fee. TalkTalk charges £30 for its modem. Orange and Sky both offer free modems.

The prices of these broadband bundles are competitive compared with buying



TalkTalk charges £30 for its modem. Orange and Sky both offer them for free

similar individual services and, if you already use one of the paid-for services they come with, they're a good deal.

But look beyond headline price and consider whether the overall package suits your needs. See our 'Checklist', right, for tips on how to decide. See also our article 'Broaden your horizons', August 2006, p20.

TalkTalk owner the Carphone Warehouse said its recent announcement that it will buy AOL UK won't impact on its free deal.

**Look beyond the headline price and consider whether the package suits you**

## Checklist

Before signing up, consider the following issues

- **Contract length** To qualify for free broadband you must sign up to the paid-for service with Orange or TalkTalk for 18 months. For Sky it's 12 months.
- **Speed** Orange and TalkTalk offer an 8Mbps download speed service. Sky's is only 2Mbps – it's an extra £5 a month for 8Mbps.
- **Usage limit** TalkTalk has a generous 40GB monthly data transfer limit, but Sky and Orange both have a 2GB limit.
- **Availability** TalkTalk's free broadband is available to 70 per cent of UK households. If you live outside the catchment area, it's an extra £10 a month. Sky's free broadband covers only 35 per cent of UK households.
- **Delays** You may have to wait for connection. TalkTalk estimates five weeks between sign-up and broadband activation.
- **Customer service** Neither TalkTalk nor Orange (previously Wanadoo) did well for customer satisfaction in our last broadband survey. We've since had a string of complaints about TalkTalk's customer service. Sky launched its broadband after our survey was completed. TalkTalk says it's improved customer service, but if you don't want to take a gamble, consider one of our Best Buys – Global, Waitrose or Zen Internet.

	PACKAGE		BROADBAND DETAILS							SCORE %
	BROADBAND FREE WITH	MIN COST OF TARIFF (£)	DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	LIMIT (GB)	TIE-IN (months)	ACTIVATION FEE (£)	AVAILABILITY (%)	PHONE SUPPORT (p per minute)	
ORANGE	Pay-monthly mobile tariff	30	8	0.256	2	18	0	99	7.5 <sup>a</sup>	30
SKY	Basic TV package	15	2	0.4	2	12	40	35	8	see <sup>b</sup>
TALKTALK	Talk3 call plan	20	8	0.448	40	18	0	70	10	39

<sup>a</sup> Daytime rate from BT landline. 3.75p evenings, 1.5p weekends <sup>b</sup> Broadband service launched after the survey

### USING THE TABLE

The table shows the packages offered free.

#### Package

##### Minimum cost of tariff

The cheapest paid-for service that qualifies for free broadband. All three offer higher-priced alternatives.

#### Broadband details

**Download speed** The maximum speed, which is affected by distance from the exchange and the number of other local users. **Limit** The maximum amount of data you can transfer each month. **Activation fee** The cost of

activating your line.

**Availability** Percentage of homes that can get free broadband. Sky and TalkTalk customers outside these areas who can get broadband over a BT line have to pay extra. **Phone support** The cost per minute of

calling the company's technical helpline.

#### Score (%)

Percentage who were very satisfied with their ISP's overall service, according to our online survey of 15,693 Which? members in April 2006.

## Contacts

**Global** 0870 909 8100

www.globalnet.co.uk

**Orange** 0800 079 2000

www.orange.co.uk

**Sky** 0870 551 5515; www.sky.com

**TalkTalk** 0800 049 1212

www.talktalk.co.uk

**Waitrose** 0800 980 0018

www.waitrose.com

**Zen** 0845 058 9000

www.zenbroadband.com