



CONSIDER BOTH COST AND SERVICE

Tim Peacock 42, IT service manager

Tim Peacock has one of Virgin Media's top-level bundles and haggling when he signed up saved him money on its standard billing structure. Virgin Media's packages can be cheap – but it scored the lowest for overall bundle satisfaction of all the companies we have ratings for.

Tim said: 'Virgin's good value for money but, in my experience, heaven help you if you have a problem. For example, at one point my broadband was cut off and it took about two hours before I was put in contact with someone who could help. Now there's a 25p a minute phone charge plus 10p connection if I have problems with broadband – scandalous!'

Go a bundle

The pros and cons of getting your phone, broadband and TV services from one company, and which company's phone service is the best

In 1957, when Which? first started, your telecoms options were simple. You either had a home phone or you didn't and – except for Kingston-upon-Hull – the Post Office ran all the phone lines in the UK. Chances are that the phone itself came with a rotating dial and plenty of wire. Cordless phones were but a pipe dream, let alone phones that you could take with you when you left the home.

These days you're considered slightly old fashioned if you don't own a mobile phone. And your home-phone line not only allows you to chat to your friends and family, but also lets you surf websites, shop online, download music and even watch internet TV via broadband. It's easy to take for granted, but the communications options available to us now were unthinkable a decade or two ago. Look back even a couple of years and, generally speaking, the way in which you bought telecoms services was relatively straightforward. You simply picked each service from the supplier you liked the best, and that was that.

Ringin' the changes

Over the last couple of years, however, our choices have become more complex as many companies now offer bundles. These allow you to get more than one service from the same company, usually for a lower price

than you'd pay if you bought the equivalent services separately. The most common option, and the one that's been around the longest, is a home phone and broadband combination.

Increasingly, companies like BT, Orange and Virgin Media are bundling in other services – like digital TV or mobile. In theory, this has great money-saving potential. But when no two providers offer exactly the same deal, it can be tricky to compare bundles and choose the right option for you.

Read on for the pros and cons of switching to a bundle, including whether existing bundle customers are satisfied with the services they're receiving, plus advice on how to choose the right package for you. And for those of you who like to keep it simple and just want a basic home-phone service, check out the results of our latest home phone satisfaction survey on p27.

To bundle or not to bundle

Bundling services together can be a mixed blessing. On the plus side, you have only one company to deal with – so less paperwork – and you'll usually get more for your money. On the minus side:

- the bundled services may not meet your exact requirements in the same way as buying each service separately
- you may not be able to get the bundle you want. For example, some of Virgin's best-value deals are available only on cable, and Sky and TalkTalk's 'free' broadband deals cost extra if you don't live in an area where they've installed their own equipment in BT exchanges (LLU)
- you may be tied into a long contract for all of the services, making it harder to switch any or all of them
- sometimes low prices seem to come at the cost of lower satisfaction. Overall satisfaction with bundles isn't as high as it is with our Best Buys for individual services.

Bundles are often competitively priced, especially if you already use one of the

Jargon buster

We explain the common terms that phone and broadband suppliers use

- **INCLUSIVE ANYTIME CALLS** At any time of the day or night calls are included in your monthly tariff. Usually only UK landline calls to numbers starting 01, 02 or 03 are included.
- **Kbps/Mbps** Kilobits/megabits per second. A measure of data transfer speed. It takes about 20 seconds to download a typical 5MB music track at 2Mbps.

- **MB/GB** Megabyte/gigabyte. A measure of data size. There are 1,024MB in 1GB. See *Which?*, August 2007, p40, for details on what a monthly 2GB cap will let you download.
- **LLU** Local loop unbundled – where suppliers install their own equipment in BT exchanges. This enables them to offer faster broadband speeds and lower prices.

on bundles

Which bundle should you choose?

We suggest a range of bundles to suit different types of people – pick the one that sounds most like you and remember to balance customer satisfaction against cost



Home phone and internet

If you're not bothered about TV or mobile, take a look at Tiscali. It did well in our bundle satisfaction survey (see p26) and offers line rental, anytime UK landline calls to 01, 02 and 03 numbers and ten international destinations, and up to 8Mbps unlimited broadband for £20 a month in its LLU areas (see 'Jargon buster', p24). It will cost £8.24 extra outside these areas.

Alternatively, TalkTalk doesn't do so well for customer satisfaction but may be cheaper, depending where you live. It offers up to 8Mbps broadband with a 40GB cap, anytime calls to 01, 02 and 03 numbers, including line rental, and inclusive calls to many international destinations for £16.39 a month in LLU areas or £31.39 a month if you live outside these areas.



Keeping the family happy

Virgin Media's VIP cable package isn't cheap – it costs £85 a month – but you get up to 20Mbps broadband and home phone, including anytime UK landline calls to 01, 02 and 03 numbers and discounted international calls, around 125 TV channels plus Sky Movies, Sky Sports and Setanta Sports. You also get a V+ box that gives you access to Virgin's high-definition TV channel and doubles as a PVR, plus a standard

cable set-top box so the kids can watch different channels in another room.

Can't get cable? Pay Sky a one-off fee of £99 plus £70 a month for anytime calls, a PVR, access to its TV channels plus Sky Sports and Movies – which you can watch in two rooms – and up to 16Mbps broadband. Pay £80 a month for all that plus Setanta Sports. You also pay BT line rental of £10.50 to £12.50 a month.



If you want a new mobile phone

In the market for a new mobile? It's worth checking to see what bundles are out there. For example, if you spend £30 or more a month on your mobile bill, try Orange's mobile plus free broadband deal. You'll be tied in for 18 months – though that's becoming more common for mobiles – and you'll have to settle for up

to 2Mbps broadband with a 2GB usage cap unless you pay an extra £5 a month. A word of caution – Orange did badly in our last broadband satisfaction survey (see *Which?*, August 2007, p40) with only 18 per cent very satisfied customers overall. Alternatively, consider BT Fusion, Utility Warehouse or Vodafone.



Tight budget

To keep costs down, get a pay-as-you-go mobile plus a separate cheap landline/broadband deal. TalkTalk offers up to 8Mbps broadband with a 40GB cap, line rental and anytime calls to 01, 02 and 03 numbers for £16.39 a month in LLU-enabled areas.

If you live in a cable area, for £30 a month Virgin Media offers up to 2Mbps unlimited broadband, landline rental and anytime calls to 01, 02, and 03 numbers, plus a mobile Sim-only deal including 300 anytime, any network minutes and 300 texts a month.



Sports fans

Sky's start-level digital TV includes up to 2Mbps broadband with a 2GB cap for £15 a month – and pay £18 extra to get access to its sports channels. Alternatively, the £30 BT Vision box you can get with BT Broadband Option 1 (£17.99 monthly for a 5GB cap and up to 8Mbps service) gives you access to

Freeview TV channels plus on-demand TV content, including 242 premier league games available on demand from 10pm on the day they are played for £1.99 a game. BT Vision also lets you subscribe to Setanta Sports (£9.99 a month), which shows live premiership games.

services they come with. TalkTalk's free broadband with Talk2 International call plan costs just £16.39 a month, for example. If you had the same home phone service with TalkTalk plus an equivalent broadband package from Utility Warehouse, say, you'd pay £34.38 a month.

Do consider whether the overall package suits your needs, or you could end up tied to a long deal that isn't suitable for you. None the less, if price and convenience are

your key considerations, our table can help. Bear in mind that we've given only the basic details and the monthly price – you'll need to take into account things like equipment and connection costs, call charges and technical helpline costs, too.

We've included all the major bundle providers around – even if we don't have enough respondents to rate them all for satisfaction – and have picked the cheapest package available from each one. BT is not

in the table – although it offers home phone, broadband, mobile and TV, they are not strictly bundles. Its broadband services do include some free calls, but these are over your broadband connection (Voip), rather than over a standard landline.

Most providers combine home phone with broadband; Orange combines mobile with broadband. See 'Which bundle should you choose?', p25, if you fancy expanding your bundle beyond these options.

PROVIDER	CHEAPEST PACKAGE DETAILS						SERVICES AVAILABLE				SCORE %
	MONTHLY COST (£)	SERVICES INCLUDED IN CHEAPEST PACKAGE	MIN CONTRACT LENGTH (mths)	CALLS INCLUDED	MAXIMUM BROADBAND SPEED (Mbps)	MONTHLY USAGE LIMIT (GB)	BROADBAND	LANDLINE	MOBILE	TV	
RATED FOR SATISFACTION											
UTILITY WAREHOUSE (33)	20 (28)	B/L	12	W	8	40	✓	✓	✓		53
PIPEX HOMECALL (41)	30	B/L	12	A	8	No limit	✓	✓			41
TISCALI (137)	15 (23.24)	B/L	12	W ^a	2	No limit	✓	✓		✓	40
TALKTALK (377)	16.39 (31.39)	B/L	18	E/W ^b	8	40	✓	✓			34
SKY (92) LLU	27 ^c	B/L/TV	12	E/W	2	2	✓	✓		✓	31
SKY Non-LLU	44 ^c	B/L/TV	12	E/W	8	40	✓	✓		✓	31
VIRGIN MEDIA (1,587) Cable	20	B/L	12	W	2	No limit	✓	✓	✓	✓	22
VIRGIN MEDIA Non-cable	26 ^c	B/L	12 ^d	E/W	8	No limit	✓	✓		✓ ^e	22
NOT RATED FOR SATISFACTION											
AOL	31 (41) ^c	B/L	24	N/A	8	40	✓	✓			see ^f
FORCE9	21	B/L	1 ^g	E/W	8	1	✓	✓			see ^f
FREEDOM2SURF	25 ^c	B/L	3	A ^h	8	0.5	✓	✓			see ^f
NILDRAM	25 ^c	B/L	12	A ^h	8	0.25	✓	✓			see ^f
ORANGE	30 ^j	B/M	18	N/A	2	2	✓		✓		see ^f
PIPEX	26 ^c	B/L	12	E/W	8	2	✓	✓			see ^f
PLUSNET	21	B/L	1 ^g	E/W	8	1	✓	✓			see ^f
SUPANET	28	B/L	12	W	8	2	✓	✓			see ^f
TOUCAN	23 (25)	B/L	12	W	0.5	No limit ^k	✓	✓			see ^f
VODAFONE ^m	45	B/L/M	18	A	8	No limit	✓	✓	✓		see ^f

^a Plus international calls to 10 countries ^b Plus international calls to 36 countries ^c Includes line rental payable to BT ^d Advertised as one-month contract, but you must pay a fee if you cancel within 12 months: we regard this as a 12-month contract ^e Via a Freeview box ^f Insufficient respondents to give ratings ^g If you take out a 12-month contract you get free line activation ^h Limit of 500 minutes a month ^j Free broadband with £30+ monthly mobile package ^k Fair usage policy applies during peak hours of 6-11pm of 2.7GB a week ^m Available only to Vodafone pay-monthly mobile customers. Includes £20 mobile contract

USING THE TABLE

We list the cheapest bundle available from each provider. Number of customers surveyed for each provider in brackets – figures given for Sky and Virgin Media are overall and cannot be split between the LLU/non-LLU and cable/non-cable packages.

Cheapest package details

Monthly cost Assumes direct debit payment. We've added on line rental if it's not included in the bundle. Cost shown in brackets if greater outside of LLU areas (see 'Jargon buster', p24).

Services included in cheapest package Services available for

the given monthly cost.

B=broadband; L=landline; M=mobile; TV=television. **Calls included** Voip excluded. Inclusive home-phone calls during E=evening; W=weekend; A=anytime. **Maximum broadband speed** Download speed only, as advertised by the provider.

Services available

Services that are available as part of a bundle from the provider. May not be part of cheapest deal.

Score

Percentage of customers who are very satisfied with the overall bundled service they receive.

Back to basics

Do you just want a phone service? Our home phone survey will help you choose

As you can see from the table, right, our survey into home-phone services suggests that smaller companies, such as Toucan and Utility Warehouse, have more satisfied home-phone customers than big boys BT and Virgin Media. But spare a thought for those living in the area around Hull: they have no choice but to use Kingston Communications as their landline supplier and it's right at the bottom of our table.

What to look out for

If you opt for paper billing or choose not to pay by direct debit, you may have to pay an additional fee. Companies say it's because it costs them more to process non-direct debit payments.

Some providers, such as Tesco or TalkTalk, won't let you pay by anything other than direct debit.

When choosing a package that includes free calls, remember that 'free' usually applies only to UK landline numbers that start with 01, 02 or 03.

Depending on the calls you make, you may prefer to pay more for line rental if the company offers cheaper rates to numbers you call regularly.

You can save money on international calls or to numbers that aren't included in your deal – such as 0870 – by using a prefix provider. You dial a prefix number before the main telephone

LANDLINE PROVIDER	SERVICE DETAILS			SCORE (%)
	LINE RENTAL (£)	CONTRACT (MONTHS)	SURCHARGE IF DON'T PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT (£) (MONTHLY)	
TOUCAN (51)	11 ^a	1	2	65
UTILITY WAREHOUSE (62)	12.76 ^b	1 ^c	10 per cent of bill	63
POST OFFICE (65)	10	see ^d	1	55
TESCO (44)	11.00	3 ^e	N/A	52
TALKTALK (705)	10.50	12 ^e	N/A	45
ONETEL (245)	see ^f	see ^f	see ^f	38
BT (1,423)	11 ^g	12	1.5	32
VIRGIN MEDIA (1,583)	11	12	5	31
KINGSTON COMMS (37)	10.50	12	1	24

^a £8.99 if you take out a 12-month contract ^b Includes £1.76 a month compulsory membership of Utility Warehouse ^c 12 months if new line needed ^d 15-day notice period ^e One month for calls only ^f Available to existing customers only. Service details depend on when you joined, check your bill for details. ^g 50p monthly discount if manage account online

number to benefit from a reduced rate. 18185.co.uk charges just 0.5p a minute to call the US, for example, compared with BT standard rates of 10-15p a minute. When we asked people about their prefix providers in our survey (see 'Our research', below), both 18185.co.uk and Call1899.com had more than 60 per cent very satisfied customers.

USING THE TABLE

Sample size in brackets.

Line rental Paper billing.

Assumes direct debit.

Contract Minimum contract term. Assumes line rental is paid to the provider.

Score Percentage of people who are very satisfied with their service.

Contacts

AOL 0800 200 6045
www.aol.co.uk

BT 0800 085 7343; www.bt.com

Force9 0114 296 5197
www.f9.net.uk

Freedom2surf 0870 242 3758
www.freedom2surf.net

Kingston Communications
01482 602300
www.kingstoncommunications.com

Nildram 0800 197 1474
www.nildram.net

Onetel 0845 818 8000
www.onetel.co.uk

Orange 0800 079 2000
www.orange.co.uk

Pipex 0845 077 2455
www.pipex.co.uk

Pipex Homecall 0870 143 0838
www.homecall.co.uk

Plusnet 0114 296 5198

www.plus.net

Post Office 0800 092 0500
www.postoffice.co.uk

Sky 0870 580 0874; www.sky.com

Supanet 0800 915 8188
www.supanet.com

TalkTalk 0800 049 7831
www.talktalk.co.uk

Tesco 0800 068 0818
www.tesco.net

Tiscali 0800 107 9000
www.tiscali.co.uk

Toucan 0800 061 3612
www.toucan.com

Utility Warehouse
0871 222 7777
www.utilitywarehouse.co.uk

Virgin Media 0845 840 7777
www.virginmedia.com

Vodafone 0808 040 8408
www.vodafone.co.uk

Checklist

Essential bundling advice

■ **Price vs service** Bundling can save money, but although some companies score highly for part of each bundle, none scores highly enough for its overall bundle service to warrant Best Buy status. For Best Buy mobile and broadband providers, see *Which?*, September 2007, p62, and August 2007, p40.

■ Does free mean free?

Bear in mind that with the 'free' broadband deals on offer from Orange, Sky and TalkTalk, you'll be committing yourself to a long contract for the paid-for part of the service. There are likely to be extra costs, such as Sky's £40 connection fee or Orange's 50p-a-minute technical helpline.

■ **Line rental** Some bundle providers don't offer phone line rental. This means you'll have to pay another company for line rental – probably BT, at a cost of £10.50 to £12.50 a month.

■ **Postcode lottery** Anyone who lives in an area where a company hasn't installed its own equipment in BT exchanges may have to pay extra.

■ **Haggle** If the advertised deal isn't exactly what you need, ask the company what it can do for you – like Tim Peacock, p24.

■ **Switching** If you get several services as part of a bundle, you're more likely to be tied in for a longer period for all of them. Check before you sign up.

OUR RESEARCH

In July 2007, we asked 4,701 *Which?* online panel members about their satisfaction with their home-phone provider, and any prefix or bundled service providers. We give satisfaction scores on all providers for which there were 30 or more respondents. Our thanks to all the people who took part.



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