

Who's on the right lines?

Our latest reader survey on broadband suppliers reveals which companies are top for customer satisfaction and simple set-up

Many internet service providers (ISPs) have some way to go to satisfy their customers, according to our latest survey. We found that on average only 32 per cent of respondents were very satisfied with their broadband service.

Despite this, just three in ten people said that they would consider switching ISPs. But we also found that you shouldn't be put off switching, as broadband users are finding it easier to change their supplier. Eight out of ten respondents found the process either very or fairly easy – a slight increase on our last survey six months ago.

Whether you're unhappy with your current service, switching from dial-up or signing up to broadband for the first time, read on to find out what you should consider and which broadband provider came top for satisfaction in our survey.

For more details about broadband and a full table of broadband suppliers, visit

www.which.co.uk/broadband or see this month's issue of *Computing Which?*.

Speed issues

Last year, Which? called for Ofcom, the independent regulator for the telecommunications industry, to take action against ISPs after finding that quoted broadband speeds often weren't anywhere near the speeds customer received (see 'Is UK broadband up to speed?', *Which?*, August 2007, p40). In our recent speed test, people promised up to 8Mbps got only 2.7Mbps on average.

Ofcom has since begun discussions with several leading ISPs on this issue. This could mean a future code of practice to ensure that broadband providers are clear about what customers are able to get.

We asked respondents who had been with their provider for two years or less whether they were made aware that advertised speed may differ from actual speed when they signed up. Less than 50 per cent

could remember being told this. Even when ISPs do make it clear that the speed may vary, they often don't make it clear by how much.

In the know

In some cases, the ISP may conduct a line test to gauge the speed or provide you with information to do this yourself. This test will tell you the maximum broadband speed that your phone line can support. However, only 35 per cent of those respondents who had been with their ISP for two years or less said that their provider had conducted a live

Broadband users are finding it easier to change their supplier

OUR RESEARCH

We sent our survey to our online panel of *Which?* and *Computing Which?* members during November 2007: 13,644 members responded, including 13,036 broadband users. The customer satisfaction score (as a percentage) is based on a combination of members' overall satisfaction and their likelihood to recommend the ISP to a friend.

Jargon buster Cutting through the technobabble

■ **ADSL** Asymmetric digital subscriber line – broadband via a standard, non-cable phone line.

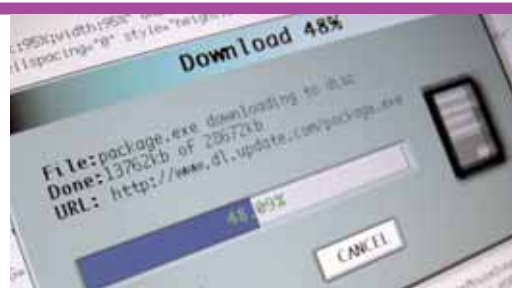
■ **Cap/limit** A restriction

on the amount of data you can download or upload from/to the internet each month.

■ **GB** Gigabyte – a measure of data storage.

There are 1,024MB in 1GB.

■ **Mbps** A measure of data transfer speed. It takes 20 seconds to download a typical 5MB music track at 2 Mbps.





85% Zen Internet

Zen achieved five stars for customer service, as well as online and telephone help. It also gained top marks for the speed and reliability of connection and ease of set-up. Zen Internet retains its Best Buy status for the third time in a row.

WE LIKE Monthly contracts mean you don't have to sign up to a year at a time



Example package: 8000 Lite, £17.99 per month, speed of up to 8Mbps and 2GB download cap

test or told them they could do it themselves. Visit www.thinkbroadband.com/speedtest.html to test your own speed.

Capped or uncapped

Our survey also revealed that users often weren't sure whether they had a capped or unlimited service. Almost a fifth of respondents were unsure. It's important to be aware of this because if you have a capped service and download more than your allowance, you'll usually be charged for each extra GB. You can find this information in your terms and conditions or by asking your broadband provider directly.

'Fair usage policies' often apply to unlimited services and prevent excessive usage. While this means that there is a limit on 'unlimited' services, such restrictions will rarely affect the average user. Check your terms and conditions for more information.

Best for set-up

Setting up your broadband can be a stressful

COMPUTING WHICH?

Computing Which? is the UK's only completely independent

computing magazine. Offering impartial, jargon-free advice, product reviews and the latest hot tips, it's the essential computing companion. To receive two issues for only £3, please call **01903 828557**.



Waitrose.com

83% Waitrose

Waitrose consistently performs well in our customer satisfaction survey and this time round is no exception. It achieved top marks for customer service, online and telephone support. Waitrose also received five stars for ease of set-up and connection speed.

WE LIKE Excellent customer service and a freephone support line

Example package: Waitrose broadband, £18.99 a month, speed of up to 8Mbps and 5GB download cap



experience. If an ISP makes it easy for you, this can make the switching process much smoother. Several ISPs achieved top marks (five stars) for ease of set-up: Eclipse, Force 9, Madasafish, Nildram, Utility Warehouse, Waitrose and Zen Internet.

Best for customer service

Our survey results show big differences between the quality of customer service offered by ISPs. Waitrose and Zen Internet were the only ISPs to gain the full five stars for customer service, online support and telephone support. This is in stark contrast to Orange and Sky Broadband, which managed just one star in all these categories.

Top value for money

Respondents were also asked to rate their ISP for value for money. Metronet, Sky Broadband, Talk Talk, UK Online and Utility Warehouse all gained five stars. Kingston Communications and Orange were deemed to be the worst value for money, both getting just one star.

Unfortunately, value for money does not necessarily lead to satisfied customers. Talk Talk received one star for ease of set-up, online support and reliability of connection, while Sky Broadband achieved the lowest ratings for customer service, online and telephone support.

Top performers

Members' favourite broadband providers overall were Zen Internet and Waitrose, both retaining their Best Buy status. Global

WHAT IF I CAN'T GET BROADBAND?

No broadband? Don't panic, there are options

Most households are now able to get ADSL broadband, and just over half can get cable broadband. However, some people living in more remote areas are too far from a phone exchange to receive broadband.

One option is satellite broadband, but this is more expensive (around £60 a month) and offers typical speeds of up to 2Mbps only. You can check which types of broadband are available in your area at www.broadbandchecker.co.uk

Alternatively, you may be able to connect via the 3G mobile network. This



allows you to surf the internet on a mobile or PC. Contact your phone provider to see if this is available.

If none of these options is viable, you can speed up a dial-up connection using Onspeed (www.onspeed.com, £24.99 a year). This compresses web pages, making them faster.

also scored highly, but as it's now under the Madasafish brand we haven't featured it as a Best Buy.

Madasafish, Utility Warehouse and Nildram gained four- or five-star ratings across the board and achieved above-average customer satisfaction scores, so they are also worth considering.

Bottom of the class

However, customers of other broadband providers weren't as happy with their service. Orange's customer satisfaction score was 36 per cent, less than half the score of top-rated Zen Internet, which scored 85 per cent. Others at the bottom of the rankings are Kingston Communications, Supanet, AOL and One Tel.

So if you're not satisfied with your supplier, switch to a Best Buy. Visit www.which.co.uk/switchingbroadband for advice on trouble-free switching.

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Contacts

Madasafish 0844 395 0830; www.madasafish.com

Nildram 0800 197 1474; www.nildram.net

Utility Warehouse 0844 815 7777; www.utilitywarehouse.co.uk

Waitrose 0800 013 2282; www.waitrose.com

Zen Internet 0845 058 9000; www.zenbroadband.com