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# Broadband on a budget

Attractive pricing, improved availability, government backing and a spate of advertising have boosted demand for faster, always-on internet access. Rosemary Haworth shows you how to ditch dialup and jump on the broadband bandwagon with BTopenworld's self-install setup kit

Blame it on the government and its apparent obsession with the benefits of web access for all. Blame it on the media's incessant calls for cheap, fast internet connections to rival the services found in the US and elsewhere in Europe. Blame it on our increasingly vocal consumer culture that looks overseas and complains that we're missing out on something many other first-world countries already take for granted. You might even blame it on World Cup fever and our demand for up-to-the minute live coverage of football matches being conducted half the globe away.

Whatever the reason, consumers and small businesses now want broadband – and they want it badly. And finally fast, reliable, reasonably-priced internet access is here. It's been a long time coming, but broadband internet has finally taken off in the UK in a big way.

According to an Ofcom report in June, there are 600,000 cable and DSL (digital subscriber line) broadband subscriptions in the UK, with 200,000 more being added each week. While this is still some way behind the figures for dialup internet access, the rate at which broadband is currently being adopted means the

## Initial preparations

Waiting times for BTopenworld's self-install products vary from a minimum of 10 days to several weeks. How long you wait will depend on your local telephone exchange's status if you're an ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) customer. This may sound like a pain but it's worse for cable customers who may have to wait until their road is scheduled to be dug up.

Having received your BTopenworld Broadband kit a few days before your due date, check through the contents of the box so you know exactly what to expect when it's time to set up the hardware and software. Note that Windows 98 and 98 SE users will need operating system discs to hand while 2000 and XP users will need to log on to their PCs as an administrator.

1 Log on to [www.btopenworld.co.uk](http://www.btopenworld.co.uk). You first need to check whether you live in a broadband-ready area – BTopenworld's site can check this for you. Simply enter your phone number and postcode into its availability line check page

2 Once you've established you can get broadband, see whether your PC is up to the job by referring to BTopenworld's comprehensive minimum requirements list. Now that you've taken care of the preliminaries, you're ready to sign up for BTopenworld. You'll need to provide a current email address for updates about when your ADSL kit will be sent out, plus notification of your username and setup password and that all-important activation date

oft-cited government goal of a 'broadband Britain' could yet become a reality.

### A piece of the action

Broadband isn't a new technology in its own right. Rather, it's a term describing a range of permanently connected, significantly-faster-than-dialup internet connections. These services allow for the faster throughput of data (made possible by the broader telephone cables – aka more bandwidth – hence the term 'broadband'). Higher speeds enable users to take full advantage of the multimedia content of the web, whether viewed online as smooth streaming media (no more five minute waits for a staccato 30-second clip) or downloaded to a local hard disk.

Practically speaking, it means no more thumb-twiddling waiting for a connection to your ISP's server and, crucial to its appeal to both businesses and leisure-time users, almost no downtime. This means online data backups, real-time video-conferencing and working collaboratively over the internet are now realistic propositions.

Home users will appreciate the fact that, unlike dialup access, broadband allows you to make calls while you surf. Businesses that are used to relatively fast leased line connectivity will find little that's different with broadband, but the pricing structure will almost certainly appeal.

### Piping up

Broadband services come in several flavours and which (if any right now) you end up with largely depends on your location. Cable and ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) are the most common options, while satellite and wireless versions are available in some areas. There is still a degree of price fluctuation as providers try to tempt new users with attractive signup deals while finetuning the terms so that they can turn a profit. However, monthly costs of around £25-30 are currently about the norm.

UK broadband prices are officially among the lowest in Europe. Even so, *PC Advisor's* demanding online pollsters still cited cost as the main deterrent

to getting a broadband connection, presumably because they were content with their existing painfully slow but free dialup accounts. Whether ISPs can support further price reductions and attract the 56Kbps (kilobits per second) crowd remains to be seen.

### Ringing the changes

Government and sport-related hype aside, a number of factors have contributed to the sudden clamour from both consumers and businesses keen to jump on the broadband bandwagon. Not least among them was April's long-anticipated installation and subscription price cuts. Supervised by Ofcom, BT effectively held all the cards in terms of local availability and the cost of extending services to third-party providers. But once it announced it was reducing its charges, rival ISPs quickly followed.

BT's long drawn-out process of upgrading telephone exchanges to accommodate ADSL connections is finally coming good, with a significant proportion of UK residents now able to sign up for ADSL, should they choose to. Initially,

the complexity and cost of this process was one of the major hindrances to the adoption of broadband.

The process begun in 1999 and, overseen by telco regulator Ofcom, focused at first on major conurbations such as London and Manchester. Since then, telephone exchanges in most towns and cities have been upgraded, though even in London whether you can get ADSL is still a postcode lottery.

This summer, villagers in rural Wales and other sparsely-populated areas are lobbying for their local exchanges to be broadband-enabled. And they look set to win since third parties agree there are sufficient numbers to make it viable.

If you can't get ADSL, you may be able to get cable broadband by signing up with NTL or another cable TV service; if not, there's always the chance a satellite or wireless operator is offering broadband in your area.

Cable, satellite and wireless access don't use analogue phonelines, so are not dependent on the status of telephone exchanges. However, they still need a certain number of subscribers before they can get off the ground. Earlier in the year, wireless broadband operator Tele2 stated it would introduce its services in selected

locations if 100 business users committed to subscribing, thereby making rollout (in Tele2's case, hitching on to an existing radio mast) financially viable. Tele2 also followed AOL's successful strategy of giving away month-long free internet trials, resulting in a flurry of new custom from people who didn't know they needed broadband until they tried it.

### Shelf awareness

Around the same time as BT lowered its subscription costs, its broadband division, BOpenworld ([www.btopenworld.co.uk](http://www.btopenworld.co.uk)), announced Plug & Go, the first off-the-shelf broadband product. By mid-June, BOpenworld announced it had signed up its 100,000th customer.

Most broadband services currently require an engineer to visit your premises and make the necessary hardware alterations to your phone and workstation setup. However, since BOpenworld launched the self-install broadband kit described in this workshop, Freeserve and AOL have followed suit. These kits come with a USB ADSL modem and accompanying installation and ISP setup software, plus ADSL filters so you can make voice calls while online.

You don't need to be particularly PC-savvy to install these kits yourself and,

if you're keen to get media-rich content such as streaming video, up-to-the-minute match reports and live news feeds, not to mention superfast downloads, it's your cheapest option right now.

### Location, location, location

It goes without saying that before you get carried away with the possibilities of broadband, you need to find out whether it's available in your area. You'll find a list of the main consumer ISPs on the PC Advisor website ([www.pcadvisor.co.uk/about/printplus.cfm](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/about/printplus.cfm)), together with single-click links to each providers' broadband home page. Go to your chosen service provider's website and type in your postcode and/or address, depending on the information requested to verify DSL or cable availability.

Although the check is probably accurate, don't take the online response as gospel. Having set up a broadband account for the purposes of writing this tutorial we used it to check out some of the other ISPs, only to be told by more than one online broadband availability checker that our local BT exchange had yet to be upgraded for ADSL connections.

With more exchanges becoming ADSL-enabled all the time and the

demand for broadband connectivity so high, the situation is changing all the time. Some sites have a map showing the areas they already cover and those that will

shortly be offered ADSL or cable connectivity. Alternatively, you might be able to find out by calling an enquiry line for an update. Remember, the information

available may not be totally up to date, so it's worth checking back once in a while as well as finding out whether a rival service is available. ■

## Installing the USB modem and software

**It's important that you install the Alcatel Speed Touch modem software before you plug in the modem itself. If, after following the next two steps, the modem doesn't appear to be correctly installed, you may also need to download updated drivers from the Alcatel website ([www.speedtouchdsl.com/support.com](http://www.speedtouchdsl.com/support.com)), particularly if you're a Windows XP user.**



**1** The Alcatel Speed Touch setup program should autorun from the CD. Its Found New Hardware Wizard should then take you quickly and easily through the setup program. If it doesn't autorun you will need to launch it manually by choosing Start, Run and browsing your CD-ROM drive for the setup.exe file. Now that the software is installed, we can move on to installing the USB modem

**2** Connect the data cable to the free socket on the Speed Touch modem and attach the other end to a free USB port on the back of your PC. If your modem is successfully installed, both the USB light and the ADSL light should show steady green after a few seconds. If they don't, double-check all your phone connections and filters and that you have the most up-to-date modem drivers. Note that the ADSL light will flash if your activation date has not yet been reached

## Installing the ADSL filters

**You will need to plug in ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) filters for every phone that's going to use the broadband connection. If you have a burglar alarm with a link to the security service or local police station, you may need to add one to its connection too. BOpenworld's Broadband Home 500 kit comes with two such filters but you can buy more for around £9.99 each, either online ([www.netlynk.co.uk/btfilters](http://www.netlynk.co.uk/btfilters)) or from electrical and computer stores.**



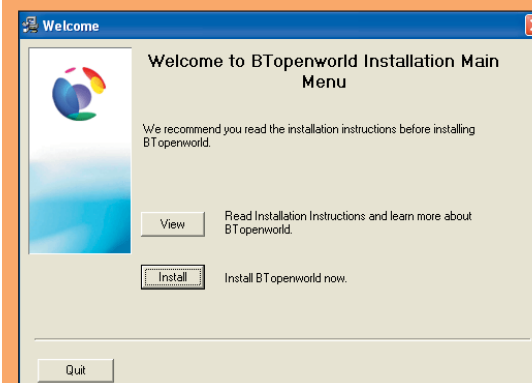
**1** Disconnect the phone jack from the wall or extension socket and insert the tail of the ADSL filter instead. Then put the original cable into the socket marked Phone on the filter. Splitter sockets can also be used. Again, insert the jack into the Phone socket on the filter



**2** For the point where the USB modem is to be attached, connect a filter to the wall socket and insert the turquoise data cable into the DSL socket. Unless you have a splitter at this point, the Phone socket will be unused

## Logging on to the broadband service

**Now that we've installed the ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) filters, the modem software and plugged the modem into the filters, it's time to get online and enjoy the wonders of broadband.**



**1** Load up the BTopenworld Broadband CD and install the software as prompted. The setup wizard will verify your hardware as well as the presence of the USB modem

**2** You should now be able to connect to the web using your broadband service. Double-click either the BTopenworld or Alcatel modem icon and you will be presented with a dialog box similar to that of a dialup account. Type in the username and password supplied to you in advance and click Connect and you will instantly arrive at the BTopenworld home page

