

broadband Q&As



Phone home

Q The previous owners of my new house were cable TV and telephone customers. Does this automatically mean I'll be able to get a cable broadband connection?

A No. This is something you must check with your cable provider. Neither NTL nor Telewest offer broadband services to 100 percent of the franchises. The reason for this dates back to the frantic acquisition of smaller cable companies in the 1990s which left just Telewest and NTL still standing. They're in charge of a motley collection of franchises with differing kinds of infrastructure, not all of which are yet capable of delivering broadband services.

Until recently, cable companies have primarily focused on stealing phone customers from BT and trying to stop Sky from walking away with the non-terrestrial TV market. The latter challenge has proved particularly daunting and has prompted a focus on winning broadband customers instead. Both Telewest and NTL are currently working flat-out to upgrade areas most demographically suited to broadband so they can start flogging profitable broadband services.

Telewest's legacy is healthier with 93 percent of its potential customers now capable of getting broadband – last autumn saw its latest broadband rollout encompass its Eurobell customers in the

south west. NTL, with its more disparate acquisition history, is further behind. Around 85 percent of NTL households are now capable of getting cable broadband services. Recent additions include Londonderry, Derby, Westminster, Leeds, Bournemouth and parts of Suffolk.

Pick and mix

Q I live in a cable area and I'm keen to get a top-speed 1Mbps (megabits per second) broadband connection, but I don't want to take the cable company's TV and phone services as well. Is there any way of avoiding this?

A Good news. You don't have to ditch your Sky satellite dish and wave goodbye to your BT phonenumber to get a cable broadband service. Telewest has a £39.99-per-month 1Mbps Blueyonder deal for internet-only customers; note, however, you'll pay £5 less for the firm's TV, phone and internet package. Meanwhile NTL charges £34.99 for its 1Mbps service and doesn't penalise non-phone-and-TV customers with an extra charge.

Long and winding road

Q Can you tell me whether I share my broadband cable connection with other users in my street?

A Yes, broadband delivered via cable – like ADSL – is

a contention service. This means that the service is shared between you and other subscribers. If you are doing a lot of downloading, other users' performances will be affected. Likewise, if they are doing a lot of downloading your service will feel the strain. The level of contention varies from product to product, but tends to be around 20:1.

AOL versus NTL

Q I've got an AOL dialup account and I'm interested in upgrading to broadband. My local exchange isn't ADSL-enabled but I am an NTL TV and phone customer. Is there any way I can get AOL Broadband via NTL cable?

A Yes, as long as the cable network is capable of delivering broadband (see *Long and winding road*, above). NTL and AOL have announced plans to offer AOL Broadband via NTL's cable infrastructure from this spring. Pricing is expected to match AOL's £27.99 ADSL product at the slightly faster speed of 600Kbps downstream.

Going back to your router

Q I know that ADSL broadband customers can hang two or three additional PCs off their single broadband connection. Can I share my cable broadband connection?

A It's just as easy as sharing any other sort of connection. You'll need a network interface card for each PC you want to connect, plus an ethernet or wireless connection so additional PCs can communicate with the machine on which the broadband connection is installed.

Alternatively you could use a broadband router, but this is not ideal for online gaming or video-conferencing. However, a router has the advantage of being a cinch to set up and, since it masks your 'true' IP address, it acts as a basic firewall and adds another rudimentary layer of security.

You'll find some useful information about the type of connection that will best suit you, depending on your bandwidth and content needs, at www.homenethelp.com/connection-sharing.asp. ■