

Fat pipes start at 512Kbps, say PCA readers

Broadband speeds should be defined as starting at 512Kbps, according to the majority of respondents to a recent poll on the *PC Advisor* website.

Well over half (56.8 percent) considered 512Kbps downstream speeds to be broadband's rightful starting point. Just one in five (21 percent) considered a 128Kbps service to constitute broadband.

The results came hard on the heels of the Advertising Standards Authority's decision to rap cableco NTL on the knuckles for advertising its 128Kbps (now increased to 150Kbps) as 'high-speed' broadband access, when the bulk of broadband services offered in the UK are 512Kbps and above.

"'Broadband', without qualification, was likely to mislead," ruled the authority.

The poll is also potentially bad news for ISPs such as Tiscali and Supanet, both of which are selling 256Kbps 'broadband' services, in the hope of up-selling customers to faster, more profitable products in the future.



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Small biz set to save big bucks

Small businesses look like being the chief beneficiaries of BT Wholesale's recent price cuts, with savings of up to £700 per year. The reductions come into effect on 1 May.

ISPs buying BT Wholesale's entry-level IPStream Office 500 (512Kbps downstream) service have seen charges felled by over 50 percent from £40 to £18. The middle-of-the-range 1Mbps IPStream Office 1000 service will see pricing fall from £60 to £28 per month, while the top-of-the-range 2Mbps service is cut from £80 to £38 per month.

Eclipse Internet, Zen Internet, Plusnet and V21 were among the first ADSL ISP resellers to pass on the cuts directly to their small business customers.

Eclipse is selling its version of ADSL Connect 500 (based on IPStream Office 500) for £32 per month – nearly a 50 percent reduction from its previous £60-per-month price tag. If you're a small business and it's 1Mbps downstream you're after, Eclipse is now charging £52 per month instead of £95. Its 2Mbps service is down from £140 to £82 a month – that's about a £700 saving over the course of a year. ISPs Zen Internet, Plusnet and V21 have all made similar pricing moves.

Telewest tests speed peddle

Responding to recent speed hikes from ADSL rivals, cable company Telewest has started piloting its own top-of-the-range 2Mbps service, which industry insiders believe will be rolled out to all broadband-enabled franchises by the summer.

According to a Telewest spokesman, "10 percent of all our customers have upgraded to the 1Mbps service which is evidence that people are prepared to pay a premium for a faster service. The demand is definitely there. Obviously it's not going to be for everyone but for us the main point is that customers have a choice."

No pricing has yet been set for the 2Mbps service. The company said this would be down to customer feedback.

Telewest's speed plans follow moves by ADSL resellers, such as Nildram, Bulldog and Internet Central, all of which are offering 2Mbps downstream speeds to residential users for as little as £39.99 per month.

When it comes to favouring one broadband technology over the other, *PC Advisor* readers would sooner plump for cable, according to a recent poll. Nearly 60 percent (58.2 percent) said they would sooner go for broadband access via fibre optic cable if offered the choice. The poll results come despite a barrage of marketing from ADSL ISPs.

• For an in-depth look at the pros and cons of cable over ADSL see *Cable vs ADSL* on page 118.

