

## How to choose an internet service provider (ISP)

When choosing an ISP, small businesses need to think carefully about the quality of the service they require. ACCAN's Tip Sheet 'Preparing your organisation's Broadband Continuity Plan' provides guidance on matching the quality of IT services with the importance of these services to your business.

There will always be a price/quality trade off when choosing an ISP, and most small businesses will need higher quality than typical household or individual consumer plans. Many ISPs have business areas on their websites and offer 'Business Grade' services. Carefully consider the inclusions and exclusions in these plans and match them to your business needs.

### The Price/Quality trade off

There are hundreds of ISPs in the Australian market and monthly prices vary significantly.

An ISP selling a plan for \$40 with 'unlimited' data may provide a lesser quality product compared with another offering a \$100 service including 500 gigabytes, so it is worth taking the time to check your usage and budget as well as the fine print in the offer.

A plan offering 'unlimited' data for a low price may appear attractive. However, where a service has many customers competing for usage, it may not perform as well as a plan offering a lower amount of data at a higher price and including service guarantees.

### Service Performance

Ask your prospective ISP about the performance of their service in your location. Factors such as coverage and distance from the telephone exchange can influence actual performance for both fixed and mobile services.

As well as your main office, it is worth checking the other locations you and your staff commonly work. Ask your ISP for 'coverage maps' for these areas.

Other important information to consider:

- connection speed (how long it takes to download and upload files)
- performance during peak periods for your business
- availability ('up time')
- how quickly your ISP responds to and resolves issues if you call their help desk

Remember to ask your friends and colleagues about their experiences. You can also read about other people's experiences and recommendations on websites such as Whirlpool.

### Look for the total cost over the whole contract

Don't be distracted by headline prices in advertising. Look for the information and prices next to asterisks (often at the bottom of the ad, or in web site 'pop outs') to find out the total cost you would pay over the whole contract.

### Set-up fees

Check the set-up/installation fees. For these services to work you might need to buy additional equipment such as a modem, router or firewall. These fees are commonly listed separately to the headline price.

### Time to be connected

Always confirm how long it will take for your new service to be connected to ensure this fits with your needs.

### How much data is included in the plan?

Most plans have data allowances that are measured in gigabytes (GB). Sites like Whistle Out have tools you can use to check how much data you are likely to use.

## Will you be charged extra if you go over your data allowance?

Some ISPs charge excess use fees if you go over your data allowance. It's important to know about these fees as they can blow out the cost dramatically. Alternatively your ISP may not charge you more, but may slow down the internet service for the rest of the billing month. If this happens, you should still be able to do the basics, like check your email.

## Monitor how much data you use

To avoid going over your data limit, ask your ISP how to check your data usage during the month. Business grade services will generally include graphical tools showing your usage but this may not be 'real-time' and could be as much as a day behind.

## What is the duration of the contract and what is the cost to cancel it early?

Most contracts are for 12 or 24 months. Some ISPs will require you to pay out the entire remaining contract months if you want to cancel your contract early. Some ISPs offer services on a "no lock-in" or "month-to-month" basis, but there will probably be higher installation and set-up charges.



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SMALL BUSINESS TIPSHEET

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