

Broadband: Worth Its Weight for Curing World Wide Wait?

Almost one-third of American Internet users have broadband; that's a 50% increase in just one year. The key advantage of broadband, speed, combines with an always-on connection that eliminates the wait for a dial-up connection. The disadvantages are cost, complexity of installation, and security holes that may open your always-connected computer to hackers.

If you simply do e-mail and occasional surfing, a 56k modem is probably plenty fast. But if you telecommute, download music files, or frequently tap the Web for information, always-on broadband is a real temptation.

In making your decision about broadband, consider these cautions:

- ✓ Look for a money-back guarantee, especially on the more problematic DSL service. If the vendor cannot fix your hookup within 30 days, it makes sense to cancel. Make sure you have that choice.
- ✓ Phone the vendor's technical support number before you buy. Can you live with the wait?
- ✓ You may be able to negotiate price with a broadband company. We know one cable user who was offered a lower price after telling his company he was switching to a cheaper service.

Shop around. Broadband is fully covered by all sorts of review sites on the Internet.

The broadband decision can be daunting, but it comes down to a few key factors. Do you really need it? What is actually available to you? What are the financial and technological details? Once those are clear, you may decide that the "world wide wait" doesn't sound so bad.