

Busting broadband myths

Most South African Internet users are making far more modest use of the Internet than they think and many are buying packages that are an overkill for their needs.



That's the word from Tim Walter, general manager for product and marketing at Nashua Mobile. He says that when you are choosing a broadband solution, you should opt for one that matches your lifestyle and that can be scaled up as you make use of more online services.

Says Walter: "We all welcomed the arrival of uncapped ADSL in South Africa, yet the reality is that only a handful of users crunch their way through multiple gigabytes of data a month. Many users on uncapped or large cap packages are overspending on bandwidth that they don't use."

Walter says that according to internal research conducted by Nashua Mobile, 53% of 3G/HSDPA subscribers use less than 250MB of data a month and that 71% of 1GB Capped ADSL users never hit their cap.

If the cap doesn't fit...

"The truth is that the average user is primarily using the Internet for email, social networking and basic Internet access, rather than for video streaming, big media downloads and online gaming," says Walter. "If you're making use of only basic Internet services, you might not need to buy a more expensive uncapped package."

Walter cautions, however, that data consumption is starting to rise in South Africa as access speeds improve, more content and applications become available, and cheaper access devices reach the market. When more rich content services - in the vein of Hulu or iTunes - arrive, growth in bandwidth consumption will skyrocket.

"If your needs today are modest, they might not be so in the future. That means you should not get locked into an inflexible contract that doesn't allow you to easily ramp up your bandwidth when you want to," continues Walter.

According to Walter there are five key questions to ask that to guide your broadband decision-making:

Will you be travelling with your Internet connection?

If you want Internet access wherever you are and frequently travel in more remote areas with little Wi-Fi hotspot coverage, a cellular connection might match your needs better than an ADSL line. Alternatively, if you're going to be accessing the Internet from hotels and airports a lot of the time, supplementing your home ADSL line with a Wi-Fi subscription might be sufficient.

Who will be using the Internet access?

The more users you have accessing the Internet from your account, the more data you will need. If you have children and teenagers in your home, they will probably need more bandwidth than you do. If you have more than one user accessing the Internet at a time in your household, it may be worth investing in a higher-speed connection.

What do you plan to do with your Internet connection?

If you're using it for Internet and email, then an entry-level ADSL line or a 3G/HSDPA solution from one of the cellular providers will do the trick. However, if you're planning to download a lot of content, you should investigate an uncapped ADSL solution. If you are interested in online gaming or media streaming, you need a decent cap size and a fast line making ADSL the best option for you.

Where will you be accessing the Internet from?

Your location may eliminate many options - there may be no ADSL DSLAMS available in your area or no iBurst and Neotel coverage in your area. Check with an independent service provider whether your network of choice is available in your area and what the alternatives are if it isn't.

How much is your monthly budget for Internet access?

There are options available ranging in cost from less than R150 for access and bandwidth up to R1000 or more for a 4Mbps or 8Mbps ADSL line and an uncapped account. Says Walter: "Making the right broadband decision is complicated by the fact that pricing structures and fair usage policies are not always transparent in the South African Internet industry.

"We believe that broadband providers could be doing a better job of communicating the strengths of their products to the market. However on the upside, users have a choice of wide range of quality products to select from today," concludes Walter.

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