

Internet connectivity terms explained

The internet is one of the best and most cost-effective ways to grow your small business, so why are the terms used to describe it so intimidating?



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Here are brief explanations of what internet terms actually mean to you and your business, so that you don't get bogged down by the jargon that flies around.

ISP: ISP stands for Internet Service Provider. This is a business that sells internet connectivity and services related to it. Choosing the right ISP is very important to your business; ensure you are dealing with an established, well-known company that employs experts in their field and will be able to provide you with everything you need to grow your business and support you as you do.

ADSL: ADSL stands for Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. ADSL gives you high-speed 24-hour internet access using your current landline telephone. "Asymmetrical" refers to the fact that information travelling from the internet to your computer (downloading) moves faster than information travelling from your computer to the internet (uploading).

In order to get everything your small business needs, it is advisable to have an ADSL line. It's a fast and reliable form of connectivity and it does not interfere with your normal telephone line, so you can still make and receive telephone calls whilst you're online. There are also various bandwidth packages to choose from that are designed for business use, so you can select a package that suits your specific business needs. ADSL offers businesses better reliability than a 3G service. 3G coverage and speed depend on network availability and traffic, which makes ADSL far more conducive to business environments.

VDSL: VDSL (Very-high-bit-rate digital subscriber line) is faster than ADSL, but is more expensive and suited to slightly larger businesses, so it is a good term to know for when your small business gets there.

Bandwidth: Bandwidth is the amount of information or data that can be transferred on your ADSL line in a set amount of time. The more information you can transfer in that time, the faster your internet connection.

What your business does will influence how much bandwidth you need; if you are a design agency for example, you will need to upload and download images quickly and, therefore, you would need more bandwidth than if you are a bookkeeping service.

Capped ADSL: Capped ADSL means that there is a fixed limit on the amount of data you can download each month and, once you reach that limit, you can no longer access the internet.

This is particularly useful for a small business with a limited budget that only checks its emails and social media and does the occasional Internet browsing. If, however, you plan on using your line to have multiple users, use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone services or you need to transfer large files or images on deadline, Uncapped ADSL is the better option for you.

Shaped account: A shaped account means that the network gives priority to everyday online activities, such as emails and browsing, and is a more affordable option, which is absolutely fine for an average small business that also prioritises those activities. An unshaped account means that there is no prioritisation and all items are given equal favour, and, as with uncapped ADSL, if you use Skype, VoIP, video or a VPN (Virtual Private Network) this is the way to go.

3G: 3G uses cellular networks, which means that you can get internet access anywhere that there is a mobile network, which can be particularly useful if your business requires you to be away from your office often. 3G can be unreliable and very expensive though, and should only be used when no other option is available to you.

Wi-Fi: Wi-Fi uses a wireless network and connects using radio waves and has a relatively short range. Where there is ADSL there is the potential for Wi-Fi, you simply need to connect a wireless router to your modem and set up your network allowing your mobile phone, tablet or laptop to be able to connect to it at no extra cost.

The benefit of having multiple people with multiple devices connected all at once adds that extra convenience to your business environment. Sharing a Wi-Fi connection in the office allows you easy access from any point in the building, which can be particularly useful for boardroom meetings and presentations. Also, with Wi-Fi in the office you don't have to worry about the reliability of a 3G connection or the exorbitant bill at the end of the month.

"Creating and running a small business is challenging; the internet aids in addressing some of these challenges and help shape the companies of the future," says Paul Hobden, head of small business at MWEB Connect.

"Don't be afraid of terms you do not understand, your ISP should be able to simplify and explain what they are and which is the best option for you and your business, and leave you free to focus on what you do best."

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