

This is what the perfect DSL provider looks like

The Internet – that beloved business necessity we can't imagine our lives without anymore. Now it comes in all shapes, sizes and colours. The tough part for you is that you're not a techie Internet specialist. Your business is running a business. So, in layman's terms, here's what to look for in a DSL provider to help limit those days you want to pull out your hair because of all those error messages, unreasonably slow loading times and disgraceful customer service reps that could care less if your company lives or dies.

When you cry about something, they'll be at your side with a box of tissues. Beware of the big, big players. Often they are so hierarchical that unions prevent the person on the other end of the 'help-me' line from answering questions that relate to another department because then, well, the other techie would be out of a job, wouldn't he? So instead of getting a few simple answers to a few simple questions, you get transferred around a lot, getting a telephone tour of the entire company. In other instances, providers outsource support to foreign countries. Word on the street is that customers then haven't been able to end their service at their leisure because the 'help-me' techie on the other end of the phone doesn't understand the word "cancel." To solve these issues, it may be wiser to go with a smaller, independent provider, who will not only be around when you need it most, but may even offer more customized services, giving you the attention you've been craving for your business.

The food is still hot by the time it gets delivered. Location makes a difference. DSL services of all kinds slow down as they travel longer distances, which is why remote areas might still only be discovering the joy of having a dedicated line with no other users to cram up data space (as is the case with cable). Going local is often a necessity with DSL, especially where speed and reliability are non-negotiable (for instance, if you run a VoIP or other Internet based service over the Web to your customers).

Traffic will be smooth sailing both ways if you want it to be. Businesses are often uploading more than consumers, so this is one area to be especially picky about when you first sign up for a service. Download speeds are always much higher than upload speeds with services like ADSL – a tradition that stems from the pre-file sharing era. An Internet Service Provider (ISP) should have multiple solutions available to offer, and at different price levels too. Creativity often wins the bet in this case, so if you can find aggregated DSL lines that bundle together multiple connections to offer the same effect of having one super duper line, go for it. The price should be unbeatable. The solutions commonly offered by business DSL providers is to either upgrade to SDSL – where speeds are equal in both directions – or to sell a personal fiber line for thousands and thousands of dollars, plus hefty subscription fees. In Europe, SDSL has become standard and thus makes logical sense to use. However, in North America, monopolies still dominate and, though the demand is there, the supplies are not. Translated, that means it will be expensive. However, that said, the return on investment might be worth the binge if you're up for it.

Your customers won't lose you because the power has gone out. Make sure that you get a real static IP address*, and not just a long-term one based on something called a 'DHCP' assignment, to save yourself lots of trouble down the road. Some ISPs might say they offer static IPs, but they're not real

Written by Joyce Grace. All rights reserved, no copyright infringements allowed!

hard-coded addresses. So when the power goes out, or you have to reboot the server, you lose the so-called 'static IP'. A good business DSL provider shouldn't give you that headache unnecessarily, or charge more for peace of mind with a real static IP.

People will be able to communicate with your company, not invade it. A good DSL provider will also offer e-mail services that are anti-spam and managed, if you need it.

You won't lose your kid's college fund for surfing too much. Internet access should be reasonably priced. There is competition in the Internet world, despite our perceptions. Again, going with the smaller independent provider might surprise you. Often they are overlooked and put in the shade by the big enterprises, but could not be in the limelight because they specialize in business DSL only, which may be an advantage for you. Do your research. It may also be that the higher pricing with one or another company means more bang for your buck. Then again, do you require all that bang? Where do you foresee your company in the future? Find out exactly what you get with each deal and consider your business needs before making any fast-paced decisions.

*To explain, IP addresses are like telephone numbers that computers use to communicate with each other. Dynamic IPs are addresses that change every so often so that when one computer isn't using it, another can. Static IPs are opposite – they stay the same no matter what...or at least they should. The advantage to having a static IP is that if you are running a program that requires you to be found on the Internet by various users at different times you will always be accessible. If your IP address were to change every so often at the discretion of the DHCP assignment, it would be like moving offices every couple hours, in which case you might as well be trying to do business under a rock. Web hosts have to have Static IPs, as well as VoIP companies, and those that make use of a Virtual Private Network (VPN), which enables users in multiple locations to access the same server whenever they please.