

Types of internet connections: Which is best for your small business?

Checklist

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A reliable internet connection is the lifeblood of every small and medium-sized business (SMB). But sorting through the types of internet connections to select the right fit for your business can seem like a challenge. Fortunately, business owners can lean on a checklist of factors to decide which one is the right fit for their needs.

Types of internet connections

First, it helps to know your options for the various kinds of internet connections your business can buy. SMBs should also note that upload and download speeds for different internet connections usually vary. Downloads are typically faster than uploads.

There can be various benefits and challenges with certain types of internet services. The different types of internet services you can get on the market today are:

- **Satellite connection.** This type of connection routes through satellite signals. While readily available and helpful for rural areas, the reliability of such an internet connection can depend on the weather. Rain, snow and even dust storms can slow speeds, which may not be a good option for business. Satellite speeds usually range between 12–50 megabits per second (Mbps) for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads.
- **Wireless connection.** Ground-based wireless connections can be provided through WiFi hotspots that are connected to cable and fiber services as well as through 4G and 5G wireless services.
- **Cable connection.** Data flows through coaxial cables, and you get your connection through a modem. Speeds can range from 10 Mbps to 1 gigabit per second (Gbps) for downloads, which makes it an attractive option for businesses with many internet-based tasks, such as video calls. SMB owners can also bundle cable with other communication utilities, such as phone and fax, for potential cost advantages.

- **DSL.** The “digital subscriber line” model routes through your phone line and can be bundled along with it. Speeds vary depending on where your internet service provider’s closest facility is. It is a good option for everyday tasks, such as email or basic web browsing. Download and upload speeds average around 6 Mbps and 1 Mbps, respectively.
- **Fiber.** Traveling through fiber-optic cables is the fastest among the types of internet connections, routinely delivering download speeds of 1 Gbps or higher. Upload speeds are also impressive and can be 100 Mbps or higher, and symmetrical in some instances. Fiber is not available everywhere so SMBs need to ensure the service is available in their range of operation.

Which internet plan is right for your business?

When it comes to choosing among the types of internet connections, it might be tempting to simply pick the fastest internet for your business and be done with it. But that might be overkill in some cases. Instead, being strategic about your internet plan – reevaluating your needs at least once each year – is a smarter option. Here are the factors to consider before selecting a plan:

How much internet-based software do you use?

Do you store files on the cloud? Do your employees upload and download data-intensive files all day? Do you use video-conferencing solutions routinely?

Businesses are increasingly relying on Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions for a variety of business tasks and using the internet for more than just email. More intense use will need faster speeds and high bandwidth. If you’re a graphic design or video production company, or even if you routinely use video conferencing (like a doctor’s office) and share high-resolution, data-heavy files, investing in high-speed connections is a wise investment.

Is your business dealing with sensitive customer information?

Cyber attacks on small businesses are becoming increasingly common, and the last thing you want is to put your customers' information at risk, especially if you work in an industry that deals with highly sensitive data, like the healthcare or finance sectors.

As such, you may want to look for types of internet connections and service solutions that can also provide cyber security monitoring and business recovery and continuity options, if possible. Similarly, it is important to understand the basic security features of the internet service itself, including robust security settings on the router so your passwords are better protected. You should also make sure that the passwords are strong on your router to help protect against hacking. Doing so will allow you to protect your data while enjoying all the benefits of a high-speed internet connection.

How many employees do you have?

Think about your internet connection like cars driving on a highway. The internet speed dictates the rate at which your vehicle can drive, but the bandwidth dictates how many cars can go through at high speeds. If you have just one employee with a high-speed connection, the highway is certainly wide enough for that one employee to reach those speeds. But if that same highway has to accommodate 40 employees, sooner or later, you have a traffic jam on your hands. High bandwidth essentially gives you a wider road, so more people can get on the internet highway without clogging things up.

If you have just one or two employees handling email, then a speed of 5 Mbps may do. But the higher the number of employees performing data-intensive tasks, the more speed and bandwidth you may need. On this other end of the spectrum, 1 Gbps would be ideal.

The types of internet connections to choose from vary, and understanding your SMB's needs can help you select the right fit for your business. SMBs should also evaluate cyber security monitoring options and package internet with other essential services to create more affordable bundles.

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² Based on 9.25.2019 U.S. Census population data.