

Speed trap.

By Sharon Goldman

How fast is your high speed REALLY going?

When it comes to clicking through your favorite websites, you want to move fast, right? Crawling at a snail's pace from page to page can range from annoying to mind-numbing – but luckily, with today's technology, such slowdowns are completely unnecessary. Thanks to broadband services through cable modems, anyone can race like an ocelot through sites with streaming audio and video, and downloading large files such as photos are more fun and far less frustrating.

But, with dial-up going the way of the tin can and string, some companies are trying to beat broadband at its own game by pumping up the power of your telephone line. Companies offer services they call "high speed dial-up." They claim their connections are up to five times faster than traditional dial-up and can even increase web surfing speeds to broadband-like quickness. Instead of broadband technology, they utilize

"compression" technology to shrink files and squeeze data through smaller lines. They also use "caching," which saves files to be used in the future so they don't have to be downloaded again.

But, does this dial-up "high speed" deliver on its claims? Patrick Shapland, owner of RESCUECOM™ in Atlanta, a 24-hour on-site computer repair service, says no. "It certainly is better than regular dial-up, but it's still dial-up," he says, emphasizing that cable modems offer the highest speeds, with DSL second.

Ann Westerheim, Ph.D and president of Ekaru, a technology services company in Westford, Massachusetts, agrees. "High speed dial-up is tricky, because while the compression does create more acceleration than regular dial-up, many of the things you want to do on the web cannot be accelerated, such as music and photos. So for many situations such as downloading, you're basically still just

getting dial-up performance."

For the fastest connections, true broadband access technologies, in the form of cable modems and DSL, are the best choices, say experts, with cable edging out DSL in terms of speed. "That's because cable is a dedicated medium, unlike telephone lines, and is robust enough to handle high data rates," says Gerald Flournoy, CTO of the Millennium Group in Plantation, Florida.

Westerheim points out that "DSL speeds vary widely, depending on the distance you are from the central office. So if you're downloading music or video, the performance could be bad depending on your location."

A cable modem isn't just fast, it's also one of the easiest Internet technologies to use, says Shapland. "That means setting up things like wireless is simpler. All you have to do is connect it, and it's always on."

As for the cost, recent popular options

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Speed Check

such as bundling with Cable television, digital video recorders, and digital telephone often make the incremental added price much more affordable.

"If you already have Cable, a high speed connection is definitely the way to go," says Westerheim. "There's nothing compared to speed when it comes to doing anything your family

wants to do on the web. And the difference in cost may be much smaller than you think."

"The bottom line," says Flournoy, "is that broadband has made the Internet a much more palatable experience. Everyone should work towards getting broadband – real broadband – if they're online."

Why speed matters

The things you're able to do with your high speed connection are expanding rapidly. Today, it's possible to visit with friends and family in real time, miles away, using a web cam. A boy in Georgia can play a live game of video checkers with his grandpa in Florida, and they can trash talk while doing it. Friends can exchange photos, and even home videos, from anywhere in the world.

As fascinating as all that is, it's just the tip of the iceberg compared to what's coming next. And to experience it, YOU'LL NEED SPEED.

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