

Surfing Through Jell-O?

You've seen the TV commercial for high-speed Internet access: "It's my turn to use the computer", says the obnoxious younger brother. "It's still downloading", says the obnoxious older brother. "But It's My Turn!" "It's Still Downloading!" "Mo-om!!"

I compare surfing the 'Net using a modem connection, particularly if the line is slow, to trying to surf through Jell-o. A high-speed connection is 10 – 100 times faster. How can this benefit your business?

Any firm needing to send or receive large files – graphic design, printing, engineering, manufacturing, contracting – will see dramatic time savings. A 2-hour download now takes 10 minutes or less. Attorneys, insurance brokers, architects or anyone who routinely sends multi-page contracts, drawings, architectural plans or specifications stands to gain time.

Any business that makes extensive use of Web sites will see benefits. A travel agent could book a cruise, check flights and make hotel reservations in a few seconds while the client is on the phone. What's the value of that level of service to your customers?

The leading high-speed technologies are DSL and cable. Both became available in Rockland in 2000. Cable uses existing cable TV infrastructure and is available from Cablevision. Because the cable is shared with other users actual speed can vary from moment to moment: I have seen speeds from 300k bps to 3M bps (about 10 to 125 times the speed of a modem). DSL is available from several suppliers at various speeds. Besides speed, a DSL or cable connection provides always-on service and can be shared by multiple computers concurrently. (Some providers may not permit sharing; check before signing up.)

A downside of always-on service is that computers need to be shielded from techno-parasites with excessive free time who scan the Internet looking for vulnerable computers. A \$50-150 device called a router will protect a small office network and allow multiple users to share one connection. Software products like Zone Alarm and Black Ice Defender provide additional security.

Jell-o, anyone?

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