

The truth about UK contention ratios

What is it?

The term “contention ratio” is a rather over-complicated name for a fairly simple concept; it is the maximum number of users sharing the connection between your local exchange and your ISP. The line is described as ‘contended’ because in a sense you are ‘competing’ for the bandwidth with other users. If you have a 20:1 contention ratio, for example, then you could be sharing your bandwidth with up to 19 other people, and your speed will be affected accordingly. A good analogy is to think of the traffic on a motorway. If you’re travelling at a quiet time and there aren’t many other cars on the road, then your journey will be quicker as you’ll get a better speed. Of course, if you are travelling at rush hour and there’s a lot of traffic, you will be forced to go much slower.

High contention is often a cause for complaint in the home broadband market, when users find that at peak times their connection speed is lower than they expect. While this level of contention is generally good enough for a home broadband user (if still annoying), it can be unacceptable for a business that needs consistent data speeds no matter what time of day.

When is it important?

Every business needs a certain amount of guaranteed bandwidth to ensure that their most important applications can function. For some this will be non-negotiable, and those are the businesses that require zero contention. This is available on leased line services, and our [EtherStream](#) and [SureStream](#) products. For others, bandwidth requirements are variable, and they may only need their maximum capacity at certain times of the day. As a result, having low contention on an [ADSL](#) or [SDSL](#) line is enough to meet their needs.

Contention ratios are most important when it comes to the location of your business, and how your connection is being used. Businesses in metropolitan areas, for example, need to be aware that they are more likely to experience the maximum contention on their line, as there will be more users in the area to share it. Secondly, businesses with an active remote workforce need to pay extra attention to their contention ratio. Here, the main office acts as a hub, where all remote workers will access the same connection as they request files from the central server, send and receive e-mails and use network applications. If there is high contention between the main office and the exchange, those working remotely may suffer from a reduced quality connection.

What should you expect?

The contention ratio you can expect to receive depends on your provider and on your service package. The contention ratio guaranteed by BT is 20:1 for an [ADSL](#) line and 10:1 on SDSL. As a business-only ISP with an uncongested network, Easynet Connect is able to guarantee a much lower contention ratio, with 5:1 on all [ADSL](#) and [SDSL](#) connections and zero on [SureStream](#), [EtherStream](#) and our [leased line](#).

products. As a result, our customers can be sure of getting a speed they know they can rely on, without worrying about peak times.