



Upping the game

Chris Stening, MD of Easynet Connect, explains how new ways of working means businesses need to think about higher upload speeds

The way that businesses use their internet connection is evolving, and what they need from an internet service is changing along with it. Tools such as IP telephony, video conferencing, and cloud computing services are now familiar features of the typical workplace, with employees regularly logging on to services like Skype for conference calling, Salesforce for managing relationships with customers, and online sharing software to transfer large files to colleagues or clients. Businesses need to make sure they have the necessary upload speed to support these changes in working practises, without getting carried away by download speeds.

For most companies, a symmetrical connection is what is now needed to ensure a fast flow of data both in and out, rather than the big headline download speeds more commonly promoted for consumer use. To understand why, we need to look in more detail at how the internet is being used professionally, compared to how we tend to use it at home.

Sharing the load

The most recognisable instance where the importance of upload speeds becomes apparent is when we are sharing files. The sending and sharing of large files is no longer the domain of design agencies, and many of us now often need to pass documents quickly between networks. Collaborative working has also increased use of online storage, such as Dropbox, or online file sharing software like YouSendIt. If you are using these services with a slow upload speed, you will find that it can mean a wait of up to 30 minutes to send a short video. This is just one example of how just having a high download speed is fine when you are only 'pulling' information from the internet, but it is useless when you need to be pushing data out.

Working on the web

More collaborative working also means higher demands being placed on the internet connections sending data in and out of a business. As more employers offer flexible and remote working options, employees will turn to using VOIP technology and VPNs to ensure smooth integration with other colleagues. Collaborative software like Webex and Google Apps also allows home workers to work on a document at the same time as those in the office - without the need to email different versions to people. More workers are also getting to grips with video conferencing, and Skype is just the beginning. Full HD video conferencing, currently the domain of large enterprises, is fast trickling down to SMEs. HD video in particular needs a lot of bandwidth and upload speed to function correctly.

Remote backup is another issue that underlines the importance of upload speed, as an example of how SMEs need to push out more information than ever before. As networks improve, and remove the need to have tape drives that are continually updated, online or managed backup services become an attractive option for small and medium-sized firms. However, backing up your entire business to a remote service throughout the day requires good upload bandwidth to ensure it doesn't hinder your day-to-day working.

Taking to the cloud

All of these instances refer to another crucial factor in internet usage: the growth of cloud computing. Cloud computing requires you to upload as much, if not more, information than you download. A recent study commissioned by the European Commission predicted annual

growth of 20.5 per cent in the web-based software market over the next 12 years¹. From the more basic, popular forms of cloud computing, such as Salesforce or Google Apps, to more ambitious projects that outsource your entire IT infrastructure to a virtualised cloud platform, moving anything into 'the cloud' places new requirements on speed, in particular upload speed. . While you may not notice any significant difference with a single user at home, a slow upload speed soon becomes apparent in the office.

Conclusion

If you are serious about embracing new ways of working, along with the tools that enable them, you need to ensure they have the technological infrastructure to support them. In terms of internet connection, this now means considering a fast symmetrical service, with good upload as well as download speeds, rather than traditional ADSL. As always, we recommend you talk to your provider who can help you scale your internet package to fit your business needs.

¹ 'EC study hails cloud computing growth', V3, 25th November 2009