

Computer Bits by Mark Eggert of Raad One Network Solutions, Inc.

Welcome to Computer Bits, a series of articles on computers and network information. This is the second article with Questions & Answers.

This question is very interesting and very timely. Being able to access the internet is becoming more important for businesses every day. So this issues question is: DSL is now available in my area, but I have heard there are lots of pro's and con's about DSL vs ISDN vs cable. What should I do, now and say a year from now?

There are many advantages and disadvantages to each of these three technologies for internet access. I'll start with DSL (Digital Subscriber Line). You will usually see DSL service offered as ADSL, iDSL, or XDSL. They are basically all the same with minor differences based on the provider's equipment. DSL service is sold by the speed of the service. The closer you are to the provider's office the faster the service. Most providers are installing their equipment in Ameritech's Central Offices and they provide their fastest service (768Kbps) out to 2 miles. The speed then tails off rather quickly to 128Kbps. The advantages with DSL are that the speed is constant and can be very fast. The disadvantages are that the speed does drop with distance and that DSL service is usually more expensive than ISDN and Cable.

ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) service is the oldest of the three and is available in more areas than DSL and Cable. It has a fixed speed 128Kbps and operates on a dial-on-demand system. This means you're only connected to the internet when you need to be. This is good for security but it can be costly depending on the service plan due to the number of phone calls. It's advantage is that it's wide availability. It's disadvantages are it's slower speed and the possible cost of phone calls.

Cable service is now widely available. It's speed can be as high as 1500Kbps and as low as 128Kbps, usually averaging 768Kbps. The speed varies and is based on the number of users sharing the same cable connection. Now don't be alarmed, other users sharing the same cable connection cannot see what you're doing on the internet. Cable's advantages are it's availability and usually a fast connection. It's disadvantage is that the connection speed varies and can get slow at times.

That's the current situation! A year from now we'll see DSL service with fast speeds further from the Central Offices. We'll also see Cable service with higher average speeds. ISDN service isn't going to change but it will still be around. The bottom line here is to weight the advantages and disadvantages with the costs of the services. One note of caution, a number of startup DSL Providers have gone out of business because of competition. So you may want to look for a provider that has been around for a while.

If you have a computer or network question you'd like answered and you think others would like to know the answer too, please forward them to me. My email address

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