Considerations for choosing an Internet Service Provider (ISP)

There are many national and local ISP’s who wish to connect you to the Internet for e-mail, access to the Web and for other functions.

For dialup service, there are several national ISP’s that have local numbers across the nation or 800 access numbers. If you travel a lot or live in a rural area, then you do not have to pay long distance charges. There are also many local startup companies that have begun providing access to the Internet. Look for advertisements in local newspapers, yellow pages, and other local computer publications. Be aware that the ISP industry is going through a consolidation phase as more national companies like AT&T become involved. Some ISP’s will be here today and gone tomorrow. Earthlink (www.earthlink.com) and Microsoft Network (www.msn.com) are a few of the well-known national providers. These services have made the Internet connection relatively easy and they have local access numbers for most areas of the country.

For a list of ISP’s, see www.thelist.com and www.barkers.org/online/.

Tips for Using Dialup Internet:

- Working offline means that you are not connected to the Internet when you are composing or reading e-mail. This results in less time spent online and hence less time lost to online activity. Newer versions of e-mail clients like Outlook Express will automatically send the mail or messages the next time you go on-line. This result in less time actually spent online.
- Cut out the http:// prefix. Newer versions of Firefox and Internet Explorer both recognize http:// or ftp://, so it does not have to be typed in. For example, simply type in the address www.azbar.org.
- Try to log in during off-peak hours, since there are fewer busy signals and the response time is faster.

Selection Criteria. The selection of an ISP is important since generally, you will get your e-mail at this address and access other web sources, such as the World Wide Web. If you do not have access to your mail or cannot be on the WWW, then you lose productivity. The startup time and effort to connect to an ISP can be considerable, so choose your ISP carefully. This is especially important if you get your e-mail through an ISP, since a change will generally require you to notify everyone of your new e-mail address (unless you have an Internet web account with Google like smith@gmail.com). When choosing an ISP consider:

- Reputation in the community. Ask your friends about ISP’s they use. Are they able to...
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get dial up access or are their lines busy? Before signing up, obtain the ISP access number you
would be using and call them throughout a normal day to see if you get a busy signal. How
many years have they been in business? Are there any problems with their billing department?

With broadband how often are they "down" and you are unable to use their service?
- What kind of software do you need?
- Support. A major factor in your decision should be the level of support of the ISP. Call
their support number continuously for a few days before signing up. Does anyone answer? Do
they have 7 day, 24 hour a day support?
- Price plans. The costs of Internet access may vary widely. The cost factors to
consider include:
  - Monthly and hourly charge;
  - Number of hours of access time permitted, cost of extra hours and prime vs. nonprime
time access cost;
  - Out of state connection number and any additional charges;
  - Is the cost of e-mail or file transfer services included in the basic price?
- Web page availability. Can you place your own home pages on their server? If so,
how many megabytes of storage do you get and what is the cost of extra space?

- Speed of the access line. Even if you have a 28,800 modem the ISP must be
connected to you at this same speed. Does the provider offer ISDN connection? Does the
provider offer the higher speeds such as 56,000 BPS? Does the ISP offer leased line options? If
you are connecting your office to the net, you may need this.

- E-mail addresses. Do extra e-mail addresses for employees or family members cost
extra?
- Total bandwidth of provider – Speed of the ISP’s outbound line. The ISP must
maintain sufficient outbound connection to handle all of the access calls by his or her
customers. What size line does the ISP have? Know exactly what network connection your ISP
has to the Internet. This will determine whether your ISP can handle peak load periods and
potential outages. Determine if the speed actually exists or is in the planning stage.

- Users/modem ratio. How many users are there per ISP modem or line? 10 users to 1
modem is a good ratio.
- Domain name. If you wish to use your own domain name, is it part of the subscriber
package, or does it cost extra?
- E-mail forwarding. Will they forward your e-mail if you change ISP’s?