

# Don't take your broadband speed

By Melanie Wright

MILLIONS of broadband customers are receiving speeds that are significantly lower than those advertised by providers – but there are ways to ensure you aren't paying over the odds for a service you aren't getting.

According to a recent report from telecoms regulator Ofcom, the average advertised broadband speed in the UK is 7.1 megabits (Mbs) per second, yet internet service providers are only delivering 4.1Mbs per second. A megabit is essentially a unit of information, so the higher the number of megabits that can be transmitted per second, the faster the internet connection.

The report reveals that Virgin Media, which benefits from a fibre-optic broadband network that allows vast amounts of information to be delivered at the speed of light, provides speeds closest to those advertised.

In contrast, suppliers like Tiscali

broadband, which rely on delivering broadband through copper telephone wire, provide on average less than half the advertised broadband speed.

To find out if your service is up to expectations, you can test your speed to measure the level your broadband connection is running at. You can do this by logging on to [www.thinkbroadband.com](http://www.thinkbroadband.com), or by clicking on the "speed test" link on the home page of the website [www.broadbandchoices.co.uk](http://www.broadbandchoices.co.uk).

If you find the internet speed you are receiving is much slower than advertised, then you have some protection under Ofcom's broadband speeds Code of Practice, introduced last year. This requires internet service providers (ISPs) to give an accurate estimate of the maximum speed people can expect when signing up to a service. If you are enduring speeds significantly lower than advertised, your ISP should offer you an alternative package, if there is one, and allow you to switch without

penalties. If it refuses to act, and you've gone through its formal complaint process and your concerns aren't resolved, the next thing to try is the company's alternative dispute resolution (ADR) scheme. The scheme acts as an independent middleman between the company and the customer. If the company's in the wrong, the ADR scheme can order the company to fix the problem and, if needed, pay compensation. You should find details of the company's ADR scheme on the back of your bill, or from the company's customer services staff.

Jason Glynn, communications expert at [uSwitch.com](http://uSwitch.com), said: "Consumers should not be paying for something they cannot get."

There are ways you can speed up the connection yourself, for example by moving your router. Michael Phillips, product director at [Broadbandchoices.co.uk](http://Broadbandchoices.co.uk), said: "The position of your router can have a significant effect on the quality of your wireless

connection. Place it in an area where the signal will be affected by as few obstructions and little interference as possible. For example, keep it away from appliances that emit wireless signals, such as cordless phones, and avoid barriers such as walls and doors between the router and your computer."

You can also buy devices that can help speed up your broadband service. BT offers a product called the I-Plate, which, it says, achieves speed increases of about 1.5Mbs by increasing the stability of the broadband connection. The I-Plate, or "Accelerator", is available for £7.57, but will be offered free to all BT's retail broadband customers until August 17.

Onspeed is another way to speed up your internet connection and costs £24.99 a year. It works with your PC, Mac or pocket PC and claims that it can make broadband up to five times faster. It effectively compresses the amount of information you need

to download. To find out more, visit [www.onspeed.com](http://www.onspeed.com).

You should review your broadband package regularly too, to make sure it is still appropriate for your needs. You could be paying over the odds if you've signed up for a deal that promises very high speeds and unlimited downloads if you only tend to use the internet infrequently and for small amounts of data.

Several websites – including [www.moneysupermarket.com](http://www.moneysupermarket.com), [www.broadbandchoices.co.uk](http://www.broadbandchoices.co.uk), [www.simplifydigital.co.uk](http://www.simplifydigital.co.uk), [www.uSwitch.com](http://www.uSwitch.com) and [www.simplyswitch.com](http://www.simplyswitch.com) – enable you to compare broadband prices and then switch online, but check with your current provider to see if you are locked into a contract first.

It's also worth bearing in mind that if you are in a position where you can switch to an "all-in-one" package, where you get your television, phone and broadband from the same provider, you could potentially save even more money.

tying down