

The Essential Guide to Getting Online at Home

UK  **onlinecentres**TM



Introduction

Choosing the right computing device and broadband package can be difficult and confusing. With so many different types of devices, and so much jargon to understand, it's hard to know what's right for you.

We're here to help! In the Essential Guide to Getting Online at Home we'll:

- talk you through some different types of devices and their key features and benefits
- explain some of the more confusing terms used about computers and broadband

What's a device?



Desktop

As the name suggests, a desktop is a computer that sits on or under a desk. A typical system consists of a monitor (or screen), a base unit, a keyboard and a mouse and it isn't easily moved therefore it isn't considered portable.

Desktops are the most powerful computers available and they have the power to work fast, even when you have several programmes running at the same time.

They are the best option if you want to work a lot with documents, edit photographs and download music and movies.

You can also connect more external equipment such as a webcam, printer and scanner to a desktop.

What's a device?



Laptop

Sometimes known as a notebook, a laptop is a portable device which you can use for all the same things you would use a desktop for. Laptops have become smaller and lighter (but not as light as tablets yet) over the years and also more powerful!

Laptops can be more expensive than the equivalent desktop, so you have to carefully weigh up portability against comfort and price.

Laptops have the power to work fast, even when you have several programmes running at the same time. However they do not offer a very long battery life.

You can connect external equipment such as a printer or scanner.

Laptops use a tracker pad to control the cursor rather than a mouse and some people find this difficult to use.

What's a device?



Convertible Laptop

A convertible laptop offers a laptop and a tablet in one. This type of device can be as portable as a tablet but includes a keyboard which you can attach for more comfortable typing when working on documents.

If you need both the portability of a tablet and the functionality and storage space offered by a laptop, a convertible laptop offers the best of both worlds.

You get the power of a laptop in a tablet form, so you can take full advantage of a touchscreen interface and portability whilst still being able to work easily with documents.

They are the ideal combination of complete comfort, flexibility and portability.

What's a device?



Tablet

A tablet is a small, thin and lightweight portable device which you control by using your finger or a stylus to directly touch the screen. Typing is done on an on-screen keyboard.

Tablets tend to come in 3 sizes - around 7" (inch), 8" and 10". This relates to the screen size and the smaller the screen the cheaper the price.

Tablets often have less functionality than a laptop and can be ideal for those who use the internet casually, such as reading the news or checking email and facebook. Tablets are also great for those who want to watch TV or movies while traveling or have the flexibility to use their device, for example, in the kitchen for an online recipe or listening to online radio in the bath!

While tablets tend to be low on disk storage space. You can quickly and easily remove apps (programmes) and files from a tablet to free up storage space.

Most have a battery that lasts up to 10 hours.

Summary of features and benefits

	Desktop	Laptop	Convertible Laptop	Tablet
Battery life	Mains powered	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
Portability		★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Document editing	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★
Photo editing	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★
External extras (scanner and printer)	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★
Storage	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★
Inbuilt camera (for taking photographs)			★★★★★	★★★★★
Inbuilt webcam (for video phonecalls)		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Web browsing (e.g. Facebook and Google)	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CD Drive (for audio CDs and DVDs)	★★★★★	★★★★★		

Key: the more stars the better!

What does that mean?

Whether you choose to buy a desktop, a laptop or a tablet, you'll probably come across the same types of jargon. Below are some of the common terms and their meanings.

Operating System

The operating system (OS) is the software that runs a device. It defines the look and style of a device and it's used to run programs and manage all the information on a device. It starts up programs for you and manages how a device runs.

Some operating systems you may have heard of are Google's Android, Apple's OS and Microsoft's Windows 8.

Hard Drive/Disk Storage

The hard drive is where your programmes and all your data is stored. Data being email, documents, music, movies and photographs for example. Desktop computers generally offer more hard drive space than tablets.

The size of your hard drive is important if you want to save lots of music, movies, video and photographs.

On a tablet, the larger the disk storage, the more apps (programmes) and downloads you'll be able to store on your device. However removing apps and files from a tablet is very quick and easy so you can soon free up more space if you need it.

What does that mean?

Random Access Memory (RAM) RAM is the temporary storage used by the programs and files you have open on your device. It's measured in Gigabytes (GB).

Don't confuse it with the hard drive which is the longer term memory that provides permanent storage for programs and data.

With 4GB you should be able to do pretty much everything that a computer is capable of doing for example, creating and editing documents, editing photographs, watching online TV or video clips and having lots of internet pages open at the same time. Generally the amount of RAM you have, along with your processor defines how quickly your device can run. So the more RAM, the faster the machine.

Processor

The processor (or CPU - Central Processing Unit) is the brain of a device and it defines how fast it performs.

Basic processors are found in most cheaper devices and are fine for simple tasks such as, looking at webpages such as facebook and creating and editing documents. These are called single core processors. For more complicated tasks, such as editing photographs and running a few programmes at the same time, intermediate processors offer extra power.

These are "dual core" - basically two processors running together and handling different tasks. For high-end performance, for example serious gaming and complex video editing, you may want the most powerful processors. These are quad core processors.

What does that mean?

Gigabyte (GB)

One gigabyte is equal to around 1,000 megabytes (MB).

You're most likely to see this measurement used in relation to RAM and hard drive storage along with broadband data limits.

One gigabyte of storage can hold about 240 four minute songs. The first iPod had a 5 GB drive and was advertised as "1,000 songs in your pocket." A movie is on average 4.5 gigabytes.

Terabyte (TB)

One terabyte is equal to around 1000 gigabytes (GB). You're most likely to see this measurement used in relation to hard drive storage. A terabyte is capable of storing roughly 250,000 four minute mp3s and about 500 4.4 GB movies.

1 TB is a lot of space. While it's possible to fill this, especially if you want to download and store a lot of movies, it's unlikely that an average user will fill one up very quickly.

App (Application)

App is simply a new word for programme, and is short for application. You mainly see it used in relation to tablets.

Usually you'll get a few apps on a tablet as standard; these include a YouTube viewer, web browser, email, calendar, photo and video viewer, notepad and reminders. Many other apps are free to download from the Google or iTunes App Stores.

Some specialist apps you may have to pay for and these can cost from around 50p to £5.

What does that mean?

microSD Card

microSD is a type of removable memory card used for storing data (e.g. email, documents, music, movies and photographs etc). SD is short for Secure Digital. You can buy one of these cards to use in a tablet so that you can store more data than that which is on the inbuilt hard drive. They are the smallest memory cards that can be bought and are about the size of a fingernail. microSD cards are sold in many sizes, from 64 MB to 2 GB.

Antivirus and Malware

If you use your laptop or desktop for connecting to the internet, it's best to install security software to protect yourself from online threats. Viruses and malicious software (known as malware) can slow your computer down and delete files and spyware can snoop on your activities. Keep your device safe by buying a security package, which includes antivirus and antispyware software and a firewall. This should cost around £40 and usually includes a year's updates to keep current with the latest threats. However, you may not need to actually buy security software. Sometimes a device will come with some security features already installed on it. It's best to check when you buy your device. You can also download free security tools from the internet that provide a good level of protection.

Introduction to Broadband

What's Broadband?

Broadband is a technology that allows you to access the internet for:

- emailing
- browsing the web, using Google for example
- checking facebook
- downloading movies
- watching online TV and so on

As well as getting online via a device, many televisions and games systems can use broadband to get you online now too.

Very often broadband is also wireless (Wifi), which means you can move around your house with your laptop or tablet and access your broadband connection anywhere.

Broadband is available in 90% of the UK, meaning that 10% still have to access the internet via a dial up connection. Use a site such as www.broadband-notspot.org.uk/coverage-map.html to check if you live in a broadband area.

What does that mean?

When looking into signing up for broadband, you'll probably come across all sorts of jargon. Below are some of the common terms and their meanings.

Home Broadband

Home broadband is limited to your home. If you want reliable and fast broadband, it's the best option. As well as speed and reliability you tend to get bigger download limits. Some of the best deals bundle your phone line, TV packages and broadband together into one monthly payment. If you're in a rural area your choices and speeds are likely to be more limited. However, even at its slowest speed, you should be able to carry out everyday tasks, such as checking your email and using facebook and Google.

Mobile Broadband

Mobile broadband lets you connect to the internet using the UK's mobile phone networks and is usually called 3G and 4G. It means that you can connect wherever you are as long as you have mobile broadband coverage. You're not limited to using Wifi networks and hotspots. You access it using an inbuilt Sim card or a dongle (a stick modem that plugs into your laptop or desktop). Mobile broadband enabled tablets have an inbuilt Sim card. Speed, coverage and reliability can all be problems with mobile broadband. However with the introduction of 4G mobile broadband things are starting to improve

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What does that mean?

Mobile Broadband (continued)

Mobile broadband is available on pay as you go deals, which lets you pay for downloads only when you need them and gives you more control over how much you spend each month. There are some unlimited mobile broadband deals around but they're often not as good as they sound and can often be subject to a level of acceptable use. Remember to read the small print and look for a definition of acceptable use.

ADSL

ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) is the most common form of broadband in the UK. It uses your telephone line to transmit digital information to and from the internet. Using a splitter it turns your standard copper landline line into a high-speed internet connection. Don't worry, though, you'll still be able to receive phone calls as usual, even when you're using the internet. ADSL always involves some cost for telephone line rental. An engineer will visit your home to install some equipment if you're being connected to ADSL for the first time.

Fiber Optic/ Cable

Cable broadband works via a fibre optic cable, rather than through your current copper telephone landline. Telephone services and digital TV channels can be accessed through the cable too, which means you could save some money by looking at a combined TV, broadband and phone package. However it's possible to get this type of broadband without having to pay for telephone line rental if you don't need a landline for your telephone calls.

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What does that mean?

Fiber Optic/ Cable (continued)

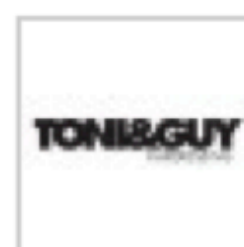
Not all areas of the UK can get this type of connection currently, although Virgin cable has good coverage and BT fibre optic is getting better. If you're a London broadband user you should have a lot of choice but those people in more rural areas will have fewer options. An engineer will visit your home to install some equipment if you're being connected to cable for the first time.

Wifi

Wireless internet (Wifi) is a way of connecting to a broadband network without having to plug a cable into your device. Almost all new devices are set up for wireless. A Wifi hotspot is an area where you can get a wireless network signal. There are thousands of Wifi hotspots in high street shops, cafés, airports and many other public buildings across the country. Sometimes you can use these connections for free. If you've seen someone at your local coffee shop surfing the web on a laptop or tablet, they're probably using the cafe's Wifi network. When you get Wifi at home many internet providers will supply you with a router, modem and wireless transmitter combined into one piece of equipment. With Wifi you can connect more than one device at the same time.

Megabyte (MB)

One megabyte is equal to around 1000 bytes. A photograph is on average 5 megabytes, so that's 5000 bytes. You're most likely to see this measurement used in relation to speed when looking at signing up for a broadband package. It refers to how many bytes per second you can download. The more bytes per second, the faster the connection.



Signing up for Broadband

How can I find the best deal for me?

The cost of home broadband can depend on several things such as length of contract, download speed and download limit.

Some people may find they get better value from a broadband provider that offers a package which includes a television or phone service, while others may opt for a broadband only deal. It's really down to you and what you need.

It's a good idea to do some research and shop around before signing up, especially as you could be signed into a contract for up to two years. You can find out what broadband deals are available by using a price comparison site. Communications regulator Ofcom has a list of approved comparison websites where you can research the best deal for you.

<http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/price-comparison>

Keep an eye out for special offers and introductory prices. You might even find you get free broadband for a short time, which can save you a lot of money! But remember the price will go up later.

What does that mean?

Here are some of the things you need to consider when comparing broadband packages.

Availability

Not all types of broadband are available in all areas. Make sure you use a postcode checker to see what broadband is available where you live. Simplify Digital have a tool which will help you find deals in your local area - www.simplifydigital.co.uk.

With mobile broadband, check each provider's own coverage checker.

Speed

Speed in terms of broadband means how long it will take for an internet page to load and how quickly you can download data. It's usually expressed as an amount of megabytes (MB). If you're a light internet user and only want to do things like check your email and browse the internet, you can probably make do with a standard speed of around 6-20MB. However, if you want to use your broadband connection for heavier use such as regularly watching online TV or downloading a lot of movies you might want to consider superfast fibre/cable if it's available.

Download speed also affects the time it takes to upload information from your device to the internet. For example, uploading a video to YouTube, adding your C.V. to a job site or uploading pictures to facebook.

What does that mean?

Data Limit

A download limit is the maximum amount of data that you can transfer from the internet to your device per month. It's usually expressed as an amount of gigabytes (GB). It's easy to go for an unlimited broadband package but you may end up using only a bit of this allowance, meaning you pay for more than you need. Lots of deals now claim to be unlimited, but remember to read the small print as some are more unlimited than others. Sometimes acceptable use restrictions apply. If you're just checking your email and facebook and visiting a few web pages and you don't download or stream TV or music very often, the smallest allowances of 1-10GBs should be enough. If you want to use the internet to also share photos online and watch video clips for example on YouTube then a limit of 10 – 20 GBs would be better. If you want to also watch online TV, play games, make internet phone calls and regularly download music and movies then you'll need 20-40 GBs. If you go over your limit you could be charged extra. If you're new to broadband keep an eye on your usage and upgrade if you need to.

Contract Length

Broadband contract lengths can last from one month to two years. When you sign up to a broadband package you have to stay with that provider for the period of time written in the contract. This means you can't cancel within that time without being charged. Longer contract terms offer better value for money, but you should be totally happy to be tied into a contract for that amount of time before you sign on the dotted line.

Useful Links

Type	Address	Information
Devices		
Help to buy a device	www.getonlineathome.org/default.aspx	GetOnline@Home is a government scheme aimed at people who may not be able to afford a computer to get online. If you're in receipt of certain benefits you may qualify for a cheaper price laptop or desktop.
Help to buy a device	www.choose.net/media/guide/features/free-computer-schemes-benefits-disabled.html	Choose website's guide on the schemes that help low income people access free or subsidised desktops and laptops.
Where can I buy a computer?	www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/guides/where-to-buy-a-computer	Brand new? Second hand? Superstore? Internet? Supermarket? There are many options when it comes to buying a computer and this guide can help you to decide what's best for you.

Useful Links

Type	Address	Information
Broadband		
Broadband Coverage Checker	www.broadband-notspot.org.uk	Broadband coverage map
Broadband Speed Checker	www.broadbandchoices.co.uk/tools/speed-test	Check the speed of your broadband. Make sure you're getting the speed you pay for!
Broadband Postcode Checker	www.broadband.co.uk	Find the cheapest, fastest and best broadband for your postcode.
Broadband Deal Comparison Site	www.simplifydigital.co.uk	Browse and compare thousands of broadband packages in your local area.
Accessibility		
Equipment and services for disabled people	www.abilitynet.org.uk/advice-information	AbilityNet is a national charity. It helps disabled people of all ages find the right access technologies so they can use computers and the Internet.

Useful Links

Type	Address	Information
Accessibility		
Equipment and services for disabled people	www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk	Action for Blind People provides training, support and practical advice on all areas of technology.
Further Learning		
Guides to computing and getting online	www.digitalunite.com/guides	Improve your computer skills such with these simple guides. Includes: emailing and Skype, using the internet, internet security, shopping and banking.
A-Z of computing	www.ageuk.org.uk/work-and-learning/technology-and-internet/a-to-z-of-computing/	Baffled by broadband? Vexed by viruses? AgeUK's A-Z of computing will help you to get the most out of your computer.
BBC Webwise	www.bbc.co.uk/webwise	Lots of interesting and interesting resources to help you understand about the internet and being online.