

MOBILE BROADBAND is here. After being packaged into physical data pipes and then transmitted at WiFi hotspots, broadband is now available through a mobile phone near you. And that's good news for customers whose days involve a non-stop stream of e-mails, "google" queries and Facebook browsing, while keeping up with their friends by instant messaging.

Mobile broadband is a relatively new term that has only recently crept into the ever-expanding IT vocabulary. What it really means is that you can surf at high speeds over the same frequency as your mobile phone. It is extremely convenient, especially for people on the road as it solves the problem of finding that Ethernet jack in a crowded coffee house.

WiFi was the previous answer for those mobile consumers who wanted or needed broadband access over the air. However, WiFi was only a partial solution – it released you from the need for wires, but you still had to find a WiFi hotspot.

Mobile broadband unshackles you from needing to find the right location since it is available wherever your mobile phone works. Setting up is a breeze – no cables, wires or unwieldy installation menus. It is also very fast, allowing you to zip through a 3MB music track download in as little as 20 seconds. Best of all, with

3 Mobile Broadband, you can enjoy all these conveniences without paying a huge bill.

Currently you have three options to use 3 Mobile Broadband: a USB modem, PC card or your phone.

Installing a USB modem – 3's sales are now over a million – is as simple as plugging it into the USB interface on your laptop. A PC Card is the same, except it uses your laptop's PCI or PCI Express slot. The mobile phone version simply uses the phone as the modem, while connected to your laptop, either using Bluetooth or with a wire. This allows you to freely receive or make calls, while speeding through the Internet at broadband speeds.

So how fast is fast? 3 Mobile Broadband, for example, uses HSDPA so you can achieve theoretical download speeds of up to 7.2Mbps, although typical speeds will average slightly less. That is similar to or even faster than WiFi. No HSDPA? Then the modem uses the available 3G or GSM to connect to the Internet. Although 3G speeds are a shade slower, they allow you to retrieve your e-mails or surf your favourite Websites with ease.

Best of all, you only pay for what you use or download. Like your mobile phone, you choose the package you want, depending on your lifestyle. For instance, 1GB will give you 100 hours on the Web, 50 music tracks, 50 hours of instant messaging and allow you to send 1,000 emails – enough data for an average consumer who wants to be connected to the world.

Take Terry Harmer in Ireland, for example. "I have tried every option for broadband," he says.

"I learned about 3, picked up a broadband pack from their store and it worked immediately. I was so impressed that I bought another one for my wife."

Now that's what you call a satisfied customer! 



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