

# Utah Business

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## UTAH'S EVOLVING ISPs

By Suzanne Kimball

The Internet may be evolving at a rate even Darwin would be proud of, but let's face it, most businesses have a hard time keeping up with that progress. Take local Internet access for example. While the number of Utah-based Internet Service Providers (ISPs) has more than tripled in the last four years, and most now offer a broad choice of Web services, chances are many Utah businesses aren't shopping around for a new ISP. The perceived hassle of switching from a national service or even to a different local ISP may keep some Utah businesses attached to Internet access that's anything but evolved.

But with at least 175 local providers now offering a range of services from Web hosting to 2 Mbit wireless connections, Internet access in Utah has come a long way. Here's what Utah businesses may want to consider if it's time to re-think their ISP:

### Proximity to Home

Some companies fear local ISPs can't always give the broad geographical coverage they need. But most large local ISPs now cover all areas of the state and in fact may offer better service than national providers. "We have found Utah ISPs generally have more reliable coverage than many national ISPs because local providers service only a specified number of users," says Chad VanZanten, co-founder of Logan-based Iodynamics LLC, a Web programming and Internet consulting firm. VanZanten points out that it only makes sense for Utah companies to be located near their ISP: "Why send to the West coast for a pound of beef when you can get it at the local super market?"

### The Need For Speed

With DSL and broadband wireless services becoming more prolific, affordable high-speed access is something Utah

ISPs of all sizes can now offer. XMission offers DSL and 56kbps dial-up services for the same price, and companies such as ArosNet, Airnet, and ReliaNet all provide wireless services that transfer data 50 times faster than dial-up modems. And because local ISPs' ratio of users to modems isn't as high as some national providers, users are less likely to face busy signals or down times.

### Making a Move

If it's time to make a move, how can a company be sure to select a good ISP? "One way to tell is by how long the provider has been in business," says Doran Barton, co-founder of Iodynamics LLP. "Any ISP that's been around for three years or more is going to offer good service, so look for the companies with a history."

A good ISP will generally charge between \$15 and \$25 for an individual dial-up account, and between \$30 and \$40 (\$50 for wireless service) for business accounts. One ISP that beats all those prices is NetWORLD Communications. It charges an annual flat fee of \$79 which translates to about \$6.50 per month. Doran Barton claims that ISPs with cheaper rates may have lesser quality services. But Steven Clegg, CEO of Beacon Strategies disagrees: "I've been with NetWORLD for 18 months and I love it. A company that charges a lower up-front fee may actually have a smarter pricing plan because they have the use of your money for an entire year. In reality, I think it saves both you and the ISP money," notes Clegg.

Still hesitant to make a change? Some local ISPs offer 30-day risk-free trials to switch. But perhaps the best incentive is to research what's available. The "Utah ISP List" at [www.utahisps.com](http://www.utahisps.com) lists virtually every ISP in Utah and is a good place to start.

### **What To Ask Before Signing With An ISP:**

1. What kind of speeds can you guarantee? Most ISPs offer two options: 1) guaranteed “floor/ceiling” speeds, or 2) no limits; speeds could be very low, but when traffic is light, very high bursts are possible.
2. Will you over-sell the bandwidth? A good ISP will stay ahead of the modem demand. If not, slow-downs and busy signals will occur because the ISP has signed up more people than it can support.
3. What is the “Customer-to-Modem Ratio?” A good dial-up service will have no more than 10 customers per modem.

4. What kind of support can I expect? You should be able to reach a live person at least during business hours. Some Utah ISP's offer 24-hour service for an extra fee.

Doran Barton offers one final suggestion: “If you are a Utah company doing business with other Utah companies, find an ISP that's connected to the Utah Regional Exchange Point (REP). If they're not connected through REP, network traffic will be sent all over the country before it comes to you. A REP-connected ISP is only a few hops away from you so data access is more direct.”

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