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Virgin Media broadband speeds up

Virgin Media is widely expected to unveil a 50 Megabits per second (Mbps) domestic broadband service.

It is the first of Britain's ISPs to roll out a next generation broadband service that runs far faster than most others available to UK web users.

So far no word has been given on pricing or which parts of the country will be the first to get it.

Currently, the fastest domestic broadband speed available from Virgin Media is 20Mbps.

Regional aid

The service will put Virgin at the top of the speed league for UK ISPs. Close behind is Be Broadband which offers at 24Mbps service for £17.50 per month.



Many efforts to accelerate web speeds demand fibre

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Details of the service are expected to be released during a morning press conference on 15 December. Trials of the high-speed service were carried out in Kent during 2008.

The service will be rolled out throughout 2009 and it is thought that Warrington will be the first place to be upgraded because of the density of Virgin customers in the area.

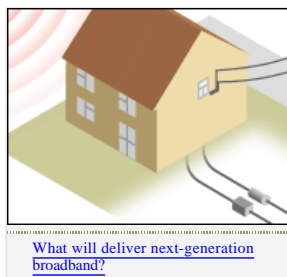
The news comes as the cable group announces that it will cut 2,200 jobs by 2012.

Rival BT has announced that Muswell Hill, in London, and Whitchurch, in Cardiff, will be the first pilot sites for its fibre-based broadband trial, which will begin in the summer of 2009.

Up to 15,000 homes and businesses will get the chance to take part in a trial of fibre to the cabinet technology which can deliver speeds of up to 40Mbps.

It has said it will invest £1.5bn in laying fibre as far as its street cabinets. The connection from the street cabinet to peoples' homes will rely on copper lines.

Charlie Ponsonby at comparison site Simplify Digital said higher speeds would drive changes in the way people use the web.



"As we see an increasing blur between the TV set and the PC, with on-demand content flowing seamlessly between the two, people's appetite for broadband speed will head rapidly upwards," he said.

"Today's average of about 2 Mbps will soon seem as inadequate as a 56 Kbps dialup connection already seems to the great majority of web users," he added.

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Not everyone is convinced that the cable modem technology on offer from Virgin Media will be enough to satisfy speed-hungry consumers.

The president of the Fibre to the Home Council of Europe, Joeri Van Bogaert, described cable modem services as "fibre to the press release".

"Cable modem can be complementary to fibre to the home (FTTH) but is in no way a substitute," he said.

The main issue is speed. While FTTH can easily deliver speeds of up to 100Mbps and could eventually pump out 1000Mbps, Virgin's service offers 50Mbps and is asymmetric.

This means that uploading content will be much slower than download speeds.

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