

[Home](#) > [Technology](#) > [Shopping for an ISP](#)

font size  

- Collections
- Services
- Technology
- Publishing
- Ask Us

AISR

- [About AISR & JEFFLINE](#)
- [Education Services](#)
- [Learning Resources](#)
- [Medical Media Services](#)
- [Scott Memorial Library](#)
- [University Archives](#)

- [Access](#)
- [Directions](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Hours](#)
- [Staff Directory](#)

Questions to Ask When Shopping for an Internet Service Provider

Be a savvy shopper when you look for an Internet access account. Review your needs and don't be shy to ask questions. Locate potential service providers locally with [TheList.com](#).

Ask some basic questions about their service:

1. **Are individual home accounts a major focus of your business?**

All different types of groups provide Internet access, including corporations of all sizes, not-for-profit companies, universities, telephone companies, and more. Internet access may not be the main service. Some ISPs target an audience of primarily business users.

Look for a provider who emphasizes its access services and is focused on the type of user you are. Look for a provider who has been in business for a reasonable length of time (you want to be sure they will be here tomorrow).

Find out how many accounts they are maintaining, and what is their ratio of modems or access points to users. The more access points per user, the better. Ask how

frequently users get bumped in mid-session or fail to get in at all.

2. **Where are your service points?**

You definitely don't want to pay long-distance phone charges for dialup access. Perhaps you want cable or DSL. Perhaps you travel frequently and want to go online while you travel. You may want wireless service, rather than the traditional hardwired service.

Look for a provider within local phone call reach, or who provides a toll-free call when traveling. Look also for a provider who duplicates equipment at major sites, for reliability and redundancy. Ask about backup systems for when the network fails.

NOTE: An access site is also called a Point of Presence, or POP for short.

3. **What software and/or hardware will you provide?**

Look for a provider who will give you a complete package of the software you will need to connect to and use the service. Software bundles may include a World Wide Web browser, an email package, and software which allows you to Telnet, FTP (transfer files from computer to computer), and more. The software you need may depend on which services you buy.

What kind of flexibility does the provider offer; for example, can you choose any Web browser you want?

Some providers now offer free computers if you sign up for access, or even free access and hardware. The catch is that you agree to be exposed to their on-screen advertising.

4. **What service plans and prices do you offer?**

Think about what services you need (an email account for the family; homepage space; chat options; simple graphical Web access; etc.). Think about how many hours per month you might spend on the service. What is available in your area and how fast a connection can you

afford (cable, DSL, basic phone dialup, wireless)? Ask the provider for a complete rate chart showing service options and pricing. Note that local ISPs tend to be much cheaper than online services if you are a heavy user.

How long is your membership commitment? Most services will work with you on a per-month basis. You may be able to save money with a 6-12 month contract, but consider whether you need more flexibility at the higher per-month rate. If you are uncertain about your needs or the performance of the vendor, it's best to spend a few months at a per-month rate while you assess your long-term needs or the vendor's performance.

How long will it take to set up your account?

Are there ever any extra assessments or fees that aren't part of the basic plan, such as fees for transferring files or receiving email?

5. Are there any special rules or restrictions on use?

Some providers charge according to the time of day access is used. Some providers have policies about "acceptable use" or restrictions on what materials can be mounted on personal pages. Some providers do not provide access to certain parts of the Internet. Sometimes providers also impose rules linking an account to a single individual, as opposed to "family plan" accounts.

6. Can you provide some references?

See if the provider is willing to give you the names of some satisfied customers.



JEFFLINE is brought to you
by
Academic & Instructional
Support & Resources
(AISR)
Thomas Jefferson University
1020 Walnut Street ·
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215-503-AISR / 215-503-

[Contact us](#) |
Editor.JEFFLINE@jefferson.edu
[u](#)
[Disclaimer & privacy policy](#)
[Promotions policy](#)
[AISRnet and AISR Wiki \(staff intranets\)](#)
Copyright ©, Thomas
Jefferson University



2477

Askalibrarian@jefferson.edu

u