

How to “surf the net”

1: Connections

We are often asked: “How can I get the internet at home?”

Like a lot of things, the answer is not straightforward, but put simply there are a two of ways you can “get” or (more accurately) *connect* to the Internet.

The two methods both involve connecting your computer to a telephone line. However, this is where the similarity between the two ends. The two forms of connection are usually referred to as “Dialup” and “ADSL” (Broadband in the UK). Firstly let’s take a look at dial-up.

To make the connection to the phone line you will need a *modem*. If your computer has a modem built in you will see a normal (Spanish) phone socket (usually on the back of a Desktop computer or the side of a Laptop). If you do not have a modem, you can either get one installed internally (Desktop), have one connected externally or plug in a *PCMCIA* card (Laptop)

Most *internet service providers* (ISP’s, companies that give access to the internet) have a facility where by you simply dial-up their computer as and when you want and pay for the service by paying for the premium-rate call (a number beginning with 90...). This is the quickest and easiest way of getting onto the internet. However, it is not cheap if you are *online* (connected to the internet) for a long time.

The next step up (in access and in cost) is to have a contract with an ISP for access.

There are two basic types of contract: limited and unlimited. Limited contracts have a limitation on when you can connect (specific times, days or both), other times are paid for in addition to the contract. Unlimited contracts allow you to dial-up anytime of the day any day of the week. If you are using the internet a lot then this can (often will) be cheaper than non-contracted access.

Dial-up internet access is SLOW. You may be waiting, literally, hours for some files to download (such as music or movies). During this time your telephone line is not available for you to make or receive phone calls. The actual speed you get will depend on many factors not the least is the time of day, because if other people (across the WORLD) are extensively accessing the same sites that you are the speed degrades noticeably.

The great benefit of dial-up is that it is (relatively) cheap you can unlimited access for as little as €16.90.

The alternative type of contact is *ADSL* (Asynchronous Digital Subscriber Line). This uses a different type of data transfer system which allows much greater speeds and still allows the phone to be used for voice calls or fax.

The equipment used to connect the phone line to the computer is often called a *router* (pronounced rooter), as it routes the data between (potentially) many computers. Most ISP’s will provide these as part of the package (in many cases they are free). This device can be connected to the computer via a *USB* (Universal Serial Bus, a connection used for many different types of equipment as well as routers, such as printers and keyboards or mice). This type of connection is common so many routers are connected this way. The alternative is via an *Ethernet* port. The Ethernet port looks like a wide phone connection (it is about 1cm wide as opposed to a phone socket being about 0.6cm). It is often found near to the USB ports.

ADSL is EXPENSIVE; in Spain, generally, you will pay around €40 (plus iva) a month for unlimited broadband. Some ISP's offer cheaper broadband with download limits which means that you can use the system whenever you like but when you have *downloaded* (received the data to your computer) a certain amount of data (pictures, music, movies or even simple web-pages) access is cut-off and you have to wait till next month before you can download anything else.

ADSL is much faster than dial-up (more than 17 times faster, in some cases as much as 54 times faster). The speeds are dependant on the telephone exchange (some providers will promise faster speeds than are possible in your area because they can be achieved elsewhere).

The other great benefit of ADSL is that you can use the phone line whilst you are online.

| | Dial-up | ADSL |
|------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Cost | Cheap | Expensive |
| Speed | Slow | Fast |
| Phone line | Occupied while on online | Available at all times |

A good compromise is to have dial-up at home then use an internet café if you need to download a large amount of data then save the data onto a storage device such as a memory stick.