

## Internet Service Providers Summarized by ECAT College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Price Quotes as of May 2003. This information is also available on-line at [cals.arizona.edu/multimedia/isp/isp.html](http://cals.arizona.edu/multimedia/isp/isp.html).

**NOTE:** The following analysis and comparison was conducted by ECAT for the purpose of exploring Internet service provider (**ISP**) options. *No vendor or commercial entity is meant to be endorsed by ECAT, and data is presented for comparison purposes only.* Prices and vendors change regularly. The most desirable contract depends on your individual use. For more information, and up-to-date pricing, contact the individual vendor at the number or website listed.

Choosing an ISP can involve many different considerations, and often the choices may be very similar. A typical user is one that uses a 56K modem for dial-up service, is on-line 1-2 hours per day, and uses the service primarily at home.

**Dial-Up ISPs** – Listed on the reverse side is information for local (Tucson), regional (Arizona), and national Internet Service Providers dial-up services. These providers offer a local telephone number for dial-up service and technical support. If you are traveling outside of your local area, you would need to dial a different number, depending on the provider. NOTE: Gain is strictly local (Tucson) with no long distance or toll-free access.

**High Speed Internet Access** – Depending on where you are located, you may be able to get high-speed Internet access to your home. DSL (Digital Subscriber Loop) and ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) are available through Qwest (1-800-996-2347 or [qwest.com](http://qwest.com)), for approximately \$40 per month. Other companies often resell DSL service, but you must still subscribe, and be available for, Qwest service. Cable Internet access is available through *Cox Communications* (Tucson - 520-884-0133, Phoenix - 602-277-1000, all other areas 1-888-751-9138 or [cox.com](http://cox.com)) for approximately \$40 per month (\$50 if you are not a cable subscriber). Contact individual vendors for up to date pricing information. All have location constraints and modem/connection fees.

**Free Internet Access** – Three major “free” Internet providers are listed below. Slow connection speeds, network availability, and service interruptions are often factors in dealing with a free ISP, as well as limited technical support, but if you want to get online for free, you must be willing to tolerate the occasional hiccups. Also, with all free providers, advertisement banner ads will appear on your screen during the time you are online. Most providers of a free service also have an upgrade to a monthly fee service, with increased benefits and features. Each also offers a \$9.95 monthly service with unlimited hours.

For more information, contact:

**NetZero** ([netzero.com](http://netzero.com)) – 10 hours per month of Internet access available.

**Juno** ([juno.com](http://juno.com)) – 10 hours per month of Internet access available.

**DotNow** ([dotnow.com](http://dotnow.com)) – Unlimited free Internet access, but there is a setup fee.

### **Issues to Consider:**

**Network Reliability:** How often is the network unavailable? What is the frequency of network outages? How many users does the company have, and what measures are in place to support them? You do not want to be in the middle of a session surfing the Internet when your connection goes down and have to re-connect often.

**Bandwidth:** What is the capacity of the Internet connection, and is it able to transfer large files from one location to another? This is particularly important if you are interested in viewing multimedia files on-line. Find out what the ISP is willing to guarantee in terms of a minimum bandwidth.

**Cost:** Before you sign up with an ISP, make sure to understand all of the payment options. Often there is a discounted rate for paying 6 to 12 months at a time. There may also be plans that give you a certain number of hours per month for a flat fee, or plans that offer unlimited access. Assess how many hours you think you will be on the Internet, and whether it is more economical to pay less for a limited number of hours.

**Support:** Think about how much help you might need to get online, use Internet software, or surf the web. Not all companies offer 24/7 phone support, and some “free” Internet companies will charge for any and all support. If you are a novice computer user, and think you might need help setting up and using the service, you may wish to consider one of the larger, national ISPs, which have an established support system in place. Ask if a local or toll-free number is available.

**Special Services:** Most ISPs offer a no-frills service, which is basically a phone connection to the Internet through which you access the web and email. Some offer you a specialized Internet browser, a large area or web space (for a personal website), and other frills that enhance your online experience. Think about what you would use the Internet for (email, surfing, games, shopping, music) and whether or not using instant messaging or a specialized browser is something that you want, or need.

**Speed:** How fast do you need your Internet to be? Are you frustrated by seemingly long waits to download a web page or file? The most inexpensive Internet connections are those that download via a phone line to a 56K modem. Often, other faster downloads are available, but at a price. DSL, cable, and wireless broadband connect you to the Internet at speed much faster than a 56K modem, but may not be available in your area, or cost almost double what a dial-up connection costs. If you are willing to pay for a faster connection, and frustrated by the slow speed of dial-up, consider a broadband ISP.

**Connection Availability:** There should be at least two access numbers that are a local call to connect to the Internet. If an ISP has a large number of subscribers, you may encounter a busy signal when you dial-up. Ask what redundancy features the company has to allow for multiple connections to the Internet’s backbone. While no ISP is able to guarantee 100% connection every time you call, consider that you are paying for a service and would like to have it available when you want to use it.

**Email:** Often ISPs offer the subscriber an email account and address with their service, and sometimes offer more than one for an entire family to have email. Consider whether you want this feature, or need it, beyond your primary college/university email account (which can be accessed via the web).

Also consider what the email size limits are, in sending or receiving attachments. Often the size of the attachment is limited to 5-10 MB, meaning that while you could download hundreds of megabytes of files daily, if you were to send a single 10MB email message (a number of photos, for example), it would get rejected.

**Travel:** To access your account when you are away from home or traveling, look for a service with a nationwide toll-free access number, or local numbers in your usual destination cities. If you are with a local ISP, they might not have an option to allow you to connect if you are out of the local area.

Also keep in mind that what might appear as a local number, may actually be a toll call within the same area code. Verify that the numbers you call to connect are actually toll-free or local.

**A note about DakotaCom.net** – The University of Arizona had a contract with DakotaCom.net to offer Internet service to off-campus UA students, faculty and staff using a modem connection. Unlike other ISPs, because of its affiliation with the UA, DakotaCom.net users were able to have full access to SABIO (library databases), have a direct high-speed connection between UA systems and DakotaCom.net, and were guaranteed a high level of service. The contract to provide Internet access to the university will expire in June 2003. Once the contract expires, you will need to use the free, sitelicensed VPN (Virtual Private Network) client software, available at [sitelicense.arizona.edu](http://sitelicense.arizona.edu), to connect to any campus resources which require UA authentication. You can use any ISP with this VPN client to connect to campus resources.