

Upstream Speeds – the forgotten aspect of broadband connectivity

Dan Cole, Head of Product Management at THUS, discusses upstream broadband speeds and their growing significance for businesses

While broadband speeds are regularly featured in the media, the majority of attention has been directed at downstream bandwidth. As down-stream speeds have increased from 8Mb to 24Mb, ISPs have looked to put their downstream speeds at the forefront of their publicity. From a business perspective download speeds are important, but they are not necessarily of primary concern. Certain businesses may require larger downloading capacity due to the nature of their work. Generally, however, applications that need a large amount of downstream bandwidth are consumer services such as online gaming. Most businesses only require enough download capacity to receive emails and attachments.

Upstream speeds, on the other hand, are of much importance to businesses but have in the past received less media attention. While focused on obtaining publicity for their ever-faster download figures, ISPs have overlooked this aspect of enterprise connectivity. Thanks to this lack of coverage, companies may not understand the importance of upload speeds to many vital business practices.

The impact upload streams have on a business largely depends on what the core focus of their work is. Businesses such as media companies will regularly upload large image and video files, so will generally need a much greater upstream capability than those which use their network for mainly standard voice and data communications.

That said, a more diverse range of companies are increasingly finding that they require larger upload capacity. Businesses which may not have sent out large files in the past are now emailing bulky files such as presentations. Estate agents, for example, are often expected to email out detailed plans, filled with images, to potential buyers. They must ensure that their broadband can cope with sending out larger files not only so their colleagues and clients receive them promptly, but also so that they do not affect the running of other important applications.

Businesses cannot afford to be complacent about their upstream capacity even if they primarily use it for email. As well as needing to send large attachments, employees increasingly expect to be able to send personal emails. These emails often have bulky attachments, yet imposing limits on the size of files that are allowed to be sent risks blocking legitimate work-related messages and alienating the workforce. With fast upstream connections companies can solve this problem and ensure their network is capable of handling personal and business traffic.

Upstream requirements are also related to the size of a business and the types of applications that it is running. VoIP is equally reliant on upstream and downstream data flows and therefore a smaller company running a number of VoIP clients needs to keep this in mind. If a small business is using a public, highly contended broadband connection while also using a large number of VoIP clients, the upstream can run red-hot and will potentially crash the system if there is not enough capacity available.

The increasing amount of employees who are taking advantage of the opportunity to work remotely is another reason for businesses to consider their upstream broadband speed. Employees need to be able to access large amounts of data from their company's server while working remotely. This means that a business becomes more reliant on broad bandwidth and high speeds to ensure files can be uploaded. If a business allows employees to work remotely they must guarantee a high quality of service and this may mean increasing their upstream bandwidth.

Installing an SDSL connection is one way for businesses to meet the need for guaranteed, higher broadband speeds. Although ADSL offers high download speeds it is usually somewhat slower on the upstream. SDSL delivers a guaranteed 3Mb for both download and upload speeds. For businesses reliant on fast upstream speeds SDSL offers a realistic way to satisfy the company's network needs, and is more widely available than is commonly believed.

When choosing a broadband connection, therefore, it is evident that businesses must go beyond simply selecting the ISP that offers the fastest download speeds. They must consider carefully how many users are required and what the network will be used for. Only once this has been established can they determine what upload and download speeds are suitable for their business requirements and invest in a network that will add real value to their core processes.