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This article outlines:

- **The equipment you need for connection to the Internet**
- **Your connection options**
- **How to choose an ISP**
- **The risks to your computer(s) once connected**

To access the Internet you will need the necessary computer equipment, a link (through a telephone line, wireless or satellite system) and a contract with an Internet Service Provider (ISP), who will connect you to the World Wide Web.

The equipment you need for connection to the Internet

You will need a personal computer (PC or Apple Mac), with an internal modem or a modem that is externally connected to a spare port on the back of your PC. The modem allows your computer to connect to another computer using a telephone line. It translates computer data into a different format to be transferred across the telephone network. A modem on the receiving computer translates your data back into computer format. If connecting via certain broadband options (see below) you may need an alternative to a telephone modem, like a cable modem or satellite transmitter/receiver.

Your connection options

Your choice of Internet connection will be determined by your business needs, available budget and the connection options within your geographical area. Most businesses use a modem and dial-up over a telephone line.

An ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) can increase your connection speed or allow more than one person access to the line at the same time. A range of high-speed connection options are now available, mostly grouped under the title of 'broadband': ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) runs on telephone lines, marketed through telecommunications suppliers, and is only available through a limited number of exchanges. Both ADSL and cable modem offer a permanent connection for a flat-rate fee – cost-effective if you have high daily usage and convenient for users who need to keep their telephone line free when accessing the Internet. Satellite or fixed wireless connections are alternative options (usually in areas that cannot get ADSL or cable modem).

You can also rent a fixed leased line from a telecommunications company to give you dedicated access to the Internet. Although more expensive, leased line provision suits a business that is highly dependent on the Internet for its communication and operations.

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How to choose an ISP

You may require a number of different services from your ISP. You may want your staff to have their own individual e-mail accounts, or you may want to have different e-mail addresses directed to the one mailbox. Alternatively, you may want e-mail handled your company's internal network rather than dial-up connections, which may mean selecting a Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) e-mail service.

Most ISPs will offer web space as part of their package, however your business may have specific needs. Access to web visitor statistics shows you how your site is performing. If you want to run specific database software or have online credit card processing, you may need to specify a particular hosting package.

Your ISP is responsible for your website's availability support. If your ISP is unreliable, their connection time slow, or technical support sometimes unavailable, your whole business is affected – not just your website. Leading Internet and e-commerce magazines, as well business partners and colleagues, will inform you about the performance of different ISPs.

A wrong decision may not be a major issue, but it's best avoided. For good impartial advice visit: <http://www.ispreview.co.uk> the Internet Service Provider Review

The risks to your computer(s) once you are connected

As soon as you go online and start receiving e-mail messages, you are potentially at risk from computer viruses. Some viruses are a nuisance – automatically forwarding themselves to all e-mail recipients in your address book. Other viruses can be malicious and either corrupt or delete files on your computer. You MUST install virus protection software and ensure that you update it frequently (at least weekly). Most packages offer a scheduled facility whereby updates are downloaded automatically. To save embarrassment, it is just as important to protect your customers and business colleagues as your own computer resources.

Additionally, whenever you are connected to the Internet, you are at risk of an attack from hackers. Those with a broadband connection have a fixed IP (Internet Protocol) address, which allows hackers to return if they find your computer of interest. A 'hardware' or 'software' firewall will protect your system.

Actions and Next Steps

- If you do not already have a suitable PC or Mac, seek advice on the best system for your needs.
- Your choice of Internet connection will determine whether you need a modem.
- Carry out research to help you choose your ISP.

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- Fully protect your computer against viruses and attack by hackers.
- Keep your anti-virus software up-to-date and download software updates regularly, e.g. Microsoft regularly issue updates to Windows and Office products which includes protection against security issues.

Source: <http://www.Scottish-enterprise.com>

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