

# How to Choose a Business Internet Service Provider

All you need to know about selecting an internet service provider (ISP) — for any business and commercial space

 Coax	↓ 400 Mb/s Down ↑ 200 Mb/s Up	\$
 Shared fiber	↓ 600 Mb/s Down ↑ 400 Mb/s Up	\$\$
 Dedicated fiber	↓ 1,000 Mb/s Down ↑ 1,000 Mb/s Up	\$\$\$



Your company has found a new space to work out of, and as you tick down your to-do list for the move, you get to “internet.” Where do you start? How much do you need? Who sells it? The best place to start is to find an internet service provider (ISP) like AT&T, Comcast or Verizon.

In this post, we’ll walk you through how to select an internet service provider (ISP) for a new commercial space. We’ve run this process hundreds of times for Meter customers and will share what we’ve learned along the way.

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## What are internet service providers (ISPs) and how do they get your space online?

An internet service provider (ISP) brings a physical internet connection (e.g., fiber or coax cable) into your space. This connection will have certain bandwidth and reliability limits depending on what you decide to buy. An ISP's services stop after bringing in this connection. Unlike your home, your business can't do much with only an internet connection. You'll need an internal network built to distribute the connection throughout your space via WiFi and wired connections. You can think of the internet like water. The ISP is the main water line coming into your building, but in order to use that water, you'll need internal plumbing and faucets.

## When should you start looking for your ISP?

Your internet may be fast, but the process of buying it? Not so much. That's because it's a physical utility and it will require at least one visit from a technician to install. Most ISPs state their standard delivery timeframe for installation is 45-60 business days. If all the infrastructure is in place, meaning the ISP already is serving the building, an installation in under 30 business days is possible, but it will be cutting it close. We recommend that you start looking into ISPs as part of your criteria for selecting a new space. Having 90 business days of lead time is ideal and leaves room in case your space needs new infrastructure to be built.

## Finding ISPs in your building

The first step is to decide which ISPs you will contact to request quotes. Some buildings will already have one or two ISPs offering service in them, while [class A buildings](#) may have three or four. The timeframes for an ISP to install service in a building where they are not already present can run up to 90 days and sometimes more. For this reason, we recommend that you only solicit quotes from ISPs that already provide service to customers in your building. The best way to figure this out is to ask your real estate broker, building manager, or other tenants which ISPs are available.

## Gathering requirements for a quote

Now that you know which ISPs are available in your building, you need to determine your requirements to request a quote. The most important requirements will be the bandwidth you need and the duration of contract you want.

## How much bandwidth do you need?

Because gigabit speed has become a major marketing point for consumer broadband plans, you might think that you need a gigabit or more for your space. That's not the case, and you can save a lot of money buying an internet plan that's sized correctly for the number of people that'll be using your space. Here are some benchmarks you can use to determine how much bandwidth you'll need based on the maximum headcount.

Max headcount	Bandwidth recommended
10	↓ 100 Mbps
25	↓ 150 Mbps
50	↓ 300 Mbps
100	↓ 600 Mbps
250	↓ 1,000 Mbps

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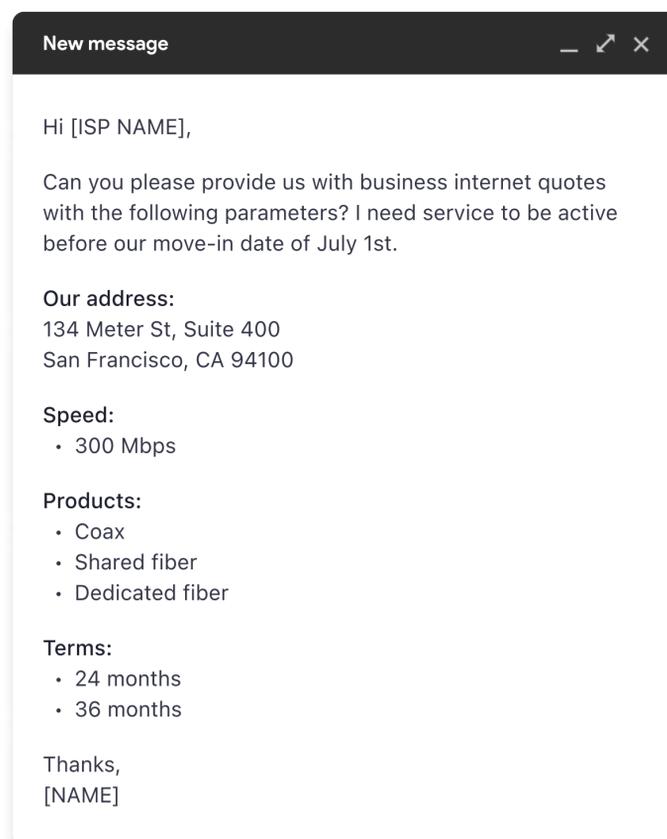
### What contract duration makes sense for you?

Contracts for internet access are long term contracts that are designed to recoup the installation cost over the life of the contract. They typically come in 12, 24, or 36 month durations with increased discounts for longer contract durations. ISP contract terms are quite inflexible, and it's almost impossible to cancel an ISP contract without paying an early termination fee of the full contract value. The one exception is that almost all ISPs will allow you to move an existing contract to a new location. You want to maximize the discount provided by a longer term contract while ensuring you can complete the duration of the contract. We recommend you choose a contract term that matches the shortest duration you think you could be in your new space.

### Requesting a quote

Now that you know which ISPs are in your building, your desired bandwidth, and your contract term, it's time to solicit quotes from those ISPs.

Larger ISPs like Comcast and AT&T allow quoting to be done through their website. Others require you to reach out over a contact form, email, or phone. You want to provide as much information as you can upfront to minimize the back and forth. Also, make sure you specify your address down to the suite or floor, as well as the day your service must be active. If I was looking for service for a new Meter office at 134 Meter Street, Suite 400, where we expect to be for 24-36 months, and have 20 people now but will have 50 when the office is full, I would send the below message:



## Evaluating quotes

Once ISPs respond to your request for a quote, you need to make a decision about which service to choose. Below is a table of anonymized sample quotes we have collected for businesses in San Francisco over the last six months. We'll use it to highlight the various tradeoffs when evaluating a service.

Sample business internet quotes							
Product	Download	Upload	Monthly fee	Install fee	Days to install	Term (Months)	Total contract cost
1 Shared fiber 200/200	↓ 200 Mbps	↑ 200 Mbps	\$300	\$0	60	24	\$7,200
2 Shared fiber 250/250	↓ 250 Mbps	↑ 250 Mbps	\$500	\$0	60	1	\$500
3 Shared fiber 300/75	↓ 300 Mbps	↑ 75 Mbps	\$180	\$99	14	36	\$6,579
4 Shared fiber 300/300	↓ 300 Mbps	↑ 300 Mbps	\$270	\$99	14	24	\$6,579
5 Shared fiber 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$375	\$99	15	24	\$9,099
6 Shared fiber 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$349	\$0	60	24	\$8,376
7 Dedicated fiber 250/250	↓ 250 Mbps	↑ 250 Mbps	\$1,287	\$0	45	36	\$46,332
8 Dedicated fiber 250/250	↓ 250 Mbps	↑ 250 Mbps	\$1,165	\$0	28	36	\$41,940
9 Dedicated fiber 300/300	↓ 300 Mbps	↑ 300 Mbps	\$989	\$0	30	24	\$23,736
10 Dedicated fiber 300/300	↓ 300 Mbps	↑ 300 Mbps	\$784	\$0	45	24	\$18,816
11 Dedicated fiber 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$1,399	\$0	45	24	\$33,576
12 Dedicated fiber 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$1,555	\$0	45	36	\$55,980
13 Dedicated fiber 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$791	\$0	30	24	\$18,984
14 Dedicated fiber 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$1,092	\$0	60	36	\$39,295
15 Dedicated fiber 1,000/1,000	↓ 1,000 Mbps	↑ 1,000 Mbps	\$975	\$0	45	36	\$35,100
16 Coax 200/20	↓ 200 Mbps	↑ 20 Mbps	\$260	\$99	45	24	\$6,339
17 Coax 1,000/35	↓ 1,000 Mbps	↑ 35 Mbps	\$250	\$199	60	12	\$3,199
18 Wireless 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$500	\$500	21	36	\$18,500
19 Wireless 500/500	↓ 500 Mbps	↑ 500 Mbps	\$1,100	\$0	5	1	\$1,100

**Product** is the type of connectivity. ISPs generally offer three flavors of internet access: shared and dedicated fiber, and coax.

- **Shared fiber** is shared between you and everyone else on the same street—apartments, houses, and other businesses — so your speeds and latency will change based on how much other traffic there is at the same time.
- **Dedicated fiber** only runs your business traffic, and runs on more robust infrastructure. Generally service-level parameters like minimum speeds, maximum downtime, and maximum latencies will be part of the contract agreement. If those agreed-upon parameters are not met, you will receive account credits as compensation.
- Shared internet connections are more cost effective but do not have guaranteed performance and typically do not come with SLAs. We find them to be sufficient for most small and medium spaces. Customers that require SLAs and guaranteed performance can obtain it by choosing a dedicated connection.
- **Coax** is an older type of connection that uses copper wiring instead of fiber optic glass. It's slower and less reliable than fiber but can be a good option for small spaces or as a backup to a fiber connection.

At the bottom of the table below we show two Wireless providers. They can be cost effective but also tend to be able to install very quickly, so they can be a good choice when you're pressed for time.

**Upload and Download** is the bandwidth that the plan provides. It's important to note that some of these plans have the same upload and download speed, which is referred to as symmetrical connection (e.g. 1,000 Mbps/1,000 Mbps). Mid-size and large businesses should look for symmetrical connection to avoid any bottlenecks when video calling or working with large data sets.

An asymmetrical connection is when you have less upload than download speed (e.g. 1000 Mbps/500 Mbps). Asymmetrical connections are cheaper, which make it a good solution for small businesses, but it's at the cost of knowing that uploads will take a longer time.

**Install fees** cover the cost of bringing the physical internet connection to your IT room. These costs vary from provider to provider. An important point to clarify with the ISP is what is included in their installation. In most cases, cable will need to be run from the basement of your building to your space to provide service. In others, cable may need to be first brought to the building, which can cost thousands of dollars. It's critical to clarify with the ISP upfront who will pay for this work, if needed.

**Days to install** is the average timeframe for installation of the internet connection to your IT room. This varies by location, so before you sign an ISP contract make sure your ISP can commit to completing the install before your move in date. Your ISP may want to send out a technician for a site survey to ensure they can deliver the service within your timeframe.

We've seen this trip up many customers. Since install timeframes have a wide range and scheduling can be tough, we've seen 1 month installs turn into 4 months. We can't stress enough the importance of beginning your new office search with ISPs in mind.

**Term** is the number of months the contract will run. It's usually quoted in increments of 12 months and pricing drops significantly after a 12 month term.

As mentioned above, ISP contracts are quite inflexible, so it's best to choose a term that matches the shortest duration you think you'll be in your new space.

**Total contract cost** is a good way to think about the total cost of the contract over its full term including all installation costs. Since it's hard to get out of ISP contracts early, you should think about the installation cost across the full term of the contract.

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## Closing on a quote & installation

Once you've decided which ISP and product you want to buy, you'll move into the installation phase where you'll coordinate with the ISP to grant them access to your building and space to complete the installation. Coordinating with ISPs can be a hassle and a source of delayed installs, so we suggest you assign someone to project manage the installation.

We know there's a lot of considerations and options when choosing an internet service provider, and we are here to help. Meter provides internet infrastructure for businesses. When you work with Meter, we'll be your single point of contact for everything related to your network, including project managing your internet service provider. In addition, Meter handles the network installation, hardware and software, and network support. Reach out to Meter to learn how you can get faster, simpler, more secure internet & WiFi for your business:

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