

How Much *Should* Your Company Pay For High-Speed?



By Joan Burek

Well, the quick answer is — “high-speed” apparently starts at \$19 per month (according to a Web-advertised High Speed Business Internet package). But, that’s not the point.

The right answer is — high-speed services’ costs depend on *your* organization’s requirement for committed service levels, network availability and redundancy, bandwidth, and provider experience. It’s your evaluation of what’s critical to your business operations.

When you’ve made the decision to migrate from the pricier, legacy entries, such as Datapac, Frame Relay, Private Line or ISDN; or are upgrading the dial-up environment to IP (and DSL), you’ll enter a world with hundreds of telcos, network solutions providers, resellers, integrators and service management firms, all of which offer “high-speed,” but with varying degrees of commitment to service & support, network durability, capacity, and coverage. And, the degree of commitment will vary the cost.

Sometimes it is only about cost. If the disappearance of a remote site is not business impacting, then high-speed without committed service levels, redundancy, and network availability, can be (and should be) had for a song.

But regardless of your high-speed budget or flavour (copper, cable, or wireless), here is the discovery question that should be asked when weighing the pros and cons of a potential network partner.

Can They Show Proof of ... IT?

Because whatever IT they’ve promised — “but they said ...” is small comfort when critical applications and sites disappear.

There are three silos where proof should be relatively easy to provide:

- **Network:** The backbone infrastructure and your local access
- **Service Delivery:** The installation process of high-speed products and services
- **Service Support:** The Help Desk and Tier 2 technical support

Network

The proof of IT, in this case, would be the supporting materials that prove your provider can manage their own destiny, or if not that, has the clout and the tools to make things happen when things go awry. Under the “manage destiny” and “clout” classifications, **Figure 1** shows what you’d look for.

Your provider should be able to disclose the metrics and thresholds (like packet loss and latency) that launch action on their part. In addition, availability reports, which identify 6-month past and averaged

Things to Look for in a Network Service Provider	
What You Want ...	What They Should Have ...
Minimize your exposure to network failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure, redundant data centres (in diverse geographical locations) in a true data centre facility (raised floor, security, UPS, fire protection, etc.) • Redundant backbone links, and terminating equipment • Automatic network failover capability • 7 x 24 x 365 monitoring, alarming and internal support and administration of the infrastructure • Service level objectives or commitments
Minimize your exposure to your local link failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed services (and pinging is not link management) • Automatic failover • Established relationships with the copper (cable or wireless) providers (the Bells, Teluses, Aliants, and so on) due to contractual relationship, purchase volume, linked help desks, management links (or origins) and so on.
Access to reports and metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service level objective, latency, utilization, availability

Figure 1.

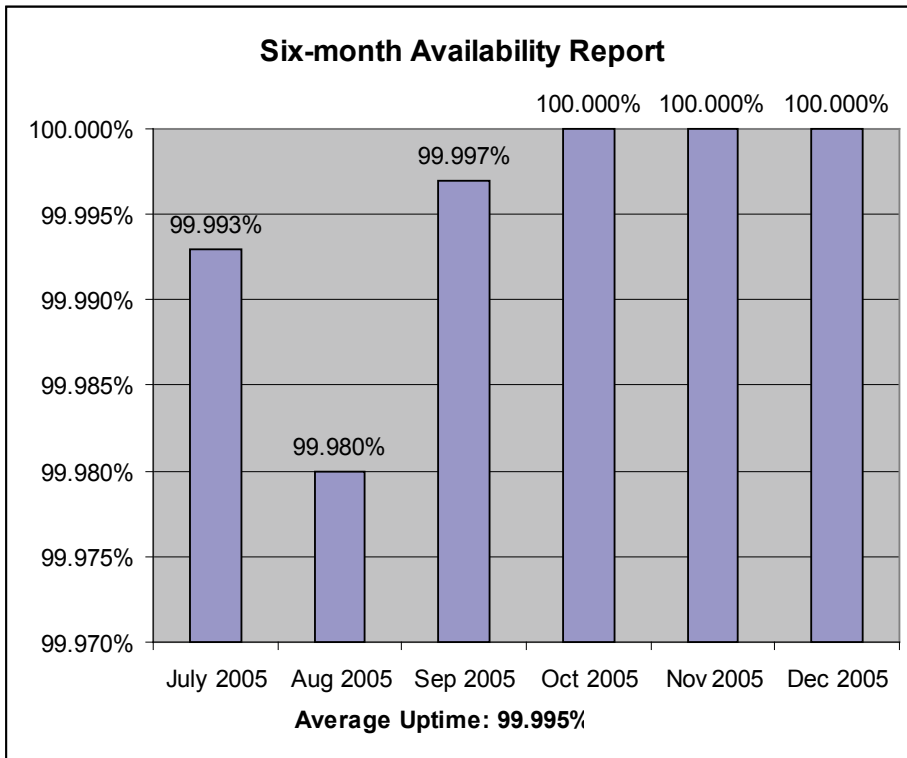


Figure 2

uptime should be easily secured. (See the example in Figure 2.) After all, this has to be a critical facet of their service. How else can they track their network effectiveness and reliability?

Why is this important? The provider's commitment to redundancy, self-management, objectives and published statistics directly translates into — *your up-time*.

Service Delivery

Smooth, non-disruptive, and easy are the descriptions usually used — during the sales cycle for services delivery and installation. How close those words hit the mark, is subject to whether the provider consistently follows their own project management methodology. (See Figure 3.) We're assuming that they have one — but many, unfortunately, don't.

And, c'mon, the surprises don't really change — alarm systems, no cabling, lost or bad equipment, facilities not available, incorrect configurations, wrong address, bad telephone number, local personnel not informed, software/hardware not ready/shipped, bad IP addresses — and the answers to all of those incidents are proper

planning, and regular communication with all your stakeholders.

One organization I know has a Services' Assurance meeting prior to the "Pre-Launch" phase of a customer rollout, with the customer and all internal stakeholders (sales, engineering, provisioning, etc.) in attendance to ensure what was committed and sold is what the customer expects (in

product, services, and timeframe), and to identify any risks to the overall project.

These meetings, coupled with tracking reports, such as on-site installation and project status, won't eliminate all risks, but certainly provide a greater degree of on-time completion (and customer satisfaction) than the alternative.

Service Support

Having great Tier 1 (help desk) and Tier 2 (technical) support is important, but it's not the ultimate marker. So what is? Reaching them in a timely fashion; so your problems, questions and updates can be easily and quickly handled.

This critical accessibility can be compromised by:

- Insufficient resources, of both telephone lines and personnel
- No overflow service to handle unanticipated call volumes
- Off-site (on pager) personnel
- No tracking, evaluation or response to call time metrics

It's important to have an on-site staffed Help Desk, with either linked or participating partners that assist in the trouble recovery (instead of contributing to the finger-pointing). Call time metrics (as displayed in the table in Figure 4) are also critical to ensure there's a match between customer call volumes, and resources.

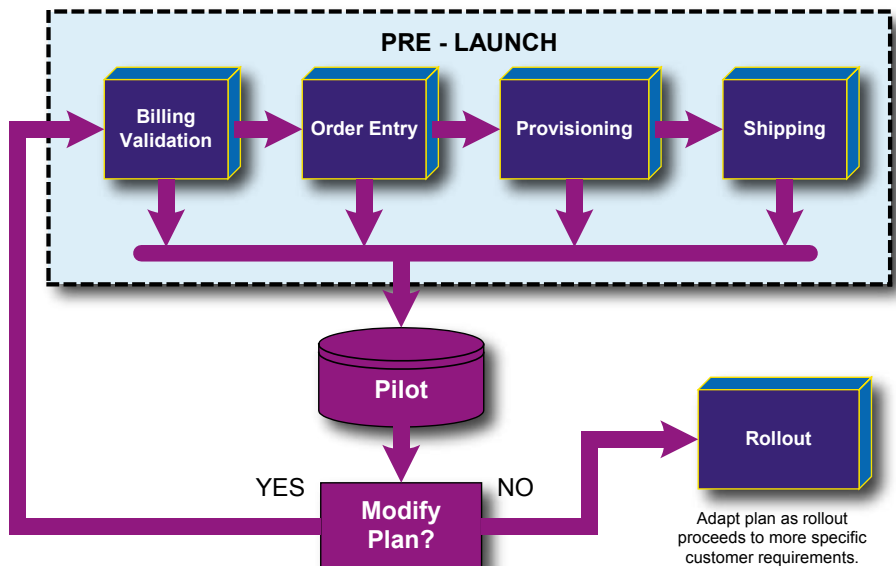



Figure 3.

The provider should have operational metrics – like 90% of technical support calls are answered within 90 seconds or less – and a formal incident management and escalation process. These items (and the proof of their use) should be readily available.

Even with all this – committed service levels, redundancy, network availability, project management methodology and accessible support – you can rest assured that high-speed's bandwidth/cost ratio is a fraction of legacy services, Datapac, Frame Relay, Private Line or ISDN. You simply get more for less.

And, oh, that advertised \$19 a month High Speed Business Internet package? It has dialup-like bandwidth, a term requirement, and very limited availability. You get what you pay for. 

Jo (Joan) Burek has designed and implemented systems and communications solutions for retail, finance, government, manufacturing, oil/gas and Internet companies for over twenty years. Radiant Communications, Ameritech (SBC), Canadian Satellite Communications, Bell Canada, Sprint Canada and Motorola are representative of the organizations that Ms. Burek has held technical and management positions. **Gateway or IP networking questions?** Please contact Jo at (647) 200-4924 (cell) or jburek@radiant.net.

January 2006 Call Times						
For The Week Beginning	Speed of Answer (min)	Longest Hold Time	Abandoned Rate	Total Received	Total Answered	% of Calls Answered
9-Jan-06	0.19	8.55	6%	1189	1118	94%
16-Jan-06	0.19	5.52	5%	1263	1200	95%
23-Jan-06	0.13	4.41	4%	1591	1527	96%
30-Jan-06	0.22	8.43	3%	1523	1477	97%

Figure 4.

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No Time for Downtime™

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