

## **What is an Internet Service Provider (ISP) & How Do I Choose One?**

An internet service provider is an organisation that provides internet access to subscribers for a fee. This could be in the form of dial up (where a computer modem dials up a server to connect) or broadband/ASDL (where a direct connect exists when the computer is started up).

In Australia there are a range of internet service providers. It is a good idea to shop around to find the provider that best meets your needs or offers coverage in your area.

The largest internet service provider (ISP) is Telstra. Big Pond is the name of the division of Telstra that provides internet access to subscribers.

Choosing an ISP can be difficult. The cheapest provider isn't always the best if you aren't able to get access when and where you need it. The most expensive may be a waste of money if you only plan to use it for a few hours a month.

Some things to think about before choosing a provider are:

- 1 How often do I want to access the internet?
- 2 Do I want to pay month by month or lock into a contract?
- 3 Do I want to be able to download information from the internet – if so, how much can I download and what are the charges for additional downloads?
- 4 How many email accounts will I need and how many can the provider offer me?
- 5 Does the provider offer a 1800 help desk number and if so, what are the hours of operation?
- 6 How do I pay for my access? via credit card, direct debit or payment in advance?
- 7 How long has the provider been in business?
- 8 Do I know anyone who uses this provider?
- 9 Am I located in a major/capital city?

If you are a small business, take some extra time choosing the right provider as costs associated with reprinting business cards, promotional materials and related stationery can be quite costly if you end up changing providers after a few months.

A list of providers in the various states of Australia can be found at <http://www.cynosure.com.au>

Remember you have to start somewhere and the beginning is usually the best place!

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