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# Why I'm giving up broadband

Dot.life

Where technology meets life, every Monday

**With an estimated five million people now connected to broadband at home, one early internet enthusiast is giving it up for good. David McCandless explains why he's given it the boot.**



“ Today, 20% of UK households - around five million people - have broadband in their homes. By the end of next year that figure will be nearer eight million. Tony Blair says every home that wants broadband should have it by 2008.

I can barely believe I've done it myself. As a committed early adopter and geek, I never thought I would ever move to a backwater in the face of technological advancement.

I had broadband before it was famous, way back in the 20th Century. In those days, most people drummed fingers on desks and made tea while they awaited their webpages and postage stamp-sized videos to trickle through their paltry 56K modems.

I, however, had a 'phat pipe' installed at home. Every evening: me, 17 browser windows open, working the keyboard like a concert pianist, dazzling my friends with all the film trailers, terrible flash animations and MP3s I could download simultaneously.

## 'Bandwidth guilt'

Gradually, though, the novelty of a fast connection has worn off. Disillusion has set in. I've slowly come to a terrible realisation: there isn't really that much I can do with broadband.

I have no far-off relatives to wave at down a video conferencing connection. Threats of divorce stopped me playing online games a few years ago. Sure, I enjoy streaming clips of the news but I can also just turn my head slightly and watch it on my TV. There used to be some joy for me feeling secure downloading hefty Microsoft security patches, but now I've given up on Windows and got a Mac instead.

Having nothing much to do with your broadband gives rise to a curious sensation that could be termed: "bandwidth guilt". When I'm not using it, I feel like I should be. I keep trying to find ways to utilise its sheer power - and justify the £30 a month fee. I feel bad if I don't.

And the only thing I've discovered that really gives my ADSL a workout is, sadly, illegal. I'd rather not go into it

“ Like some kind of petrol thief, at friends' houses I can be found hooking up my laptop for a quick broadband fix'Information habit' ”

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here. Let's just say it's the not-so-well-kept secret of what everyone is using broadband for. Depending on who you talk to, between 50% and 65% of all internet traffic is currently peer-to-peer (p2p) piracy. Everyone's doing it. Do you know what technology makes it possible? Yep. Broadband.

Spending an inordinate amount of time at my computer, using my broadband, I'm developing what I can only term an information habit.

Sit down to work. Ten minutes in, the new mail icon tempts me from the bottom of the screen. I'll just check. Nothing like a few juicy new e-mails. Click a few links. Scan a few websites. Oh 20 minutes has just passed. Better get back to work. Now where was I? Start work again. Feel like a reward. I'll just check news.bbc.co.uk. See if anything's happened in the three minutes since I last looked. Follow a few 'related links'...

Half an hour has passed. I feel like I've done something, but actually I haven't. All that's happened is that I've been distracted by constantly rising info urges. I spend most of my day like this, divided between what I need to do and what the internet wants me to do - which is look at it. Constantly.

### **The 56K Life**

So, just like a drug addict, I can't control it. If web access is there, I'll have it. Especially now, since I had wireless internet installed I can browse on the toilet, in the garden, even in the shower. There's no escape. So the only recourse for me is an extreme one: to have it chopped off.

Reaction from my friends and colleagues has been extreme. Ranging from shock and surprise (Whaaaaat? Why? How? Guh?) to outright suspicion ("Have you been downloading something you shouldn't?"). One friend even raged at me: "How could you? Don't you know broadband means progress?"

I don't regret my decision. I have to say I feel lighter, freer. I'm certainly getting more things done, especially now I schedule a time every couple of hours to log on and check my e-mail and websites.

The internet on 56K isn't as bad as I thought. Pretty much every website is designed for 56K users anyway. But I still make the mistake of impatiently opening two, three, four other browser windows while waiting for the first one to download.

### **Will it last?**

I can't say I'm missing flash or streaming video. And there's no doubt it's killed any p2p temptations I may have nurtured. And that's a good thing, right, vast corporate entertainment industry?

I do confess, however, that I now carry a network cable around with me. Like some kind of petrol thief, at friends' houses I can be found hooking up my laptop for a quick broadband fix.

I used to spend all day slaving away at my computer, watching the day ride past my window - only to come home and do the same in the evenings. But now I've distilled the useful and vital from the compulsive (and illegal), I am left with just two online activities: e-mail and web browsing.

Isn't that what the internet is really for? ”

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I applaud the sentiments of this article. I too spend all day in front of a PC & why would I want to go home and do the same?

We packed up our home PC and consigned it to the cellar about six months ago and haven't missed it at all. Whilst there is no doubt that computers and their various accoutrements are invaluable in today's e-centric business world, I can't think of any reason aside from educational/work-from-home scenarios, why anyone would need/want a PC at home. Computers in the home serve no other purpose than to soak up what valuable free time we have left after having sat in front of one all day. Anybody heard that one about the Emperor's new clothes?.

**Matt, Edinburgh**

This echoes what so many of us feel! You convince yourself you're learning, browsing through the b3ta newsletter - but you're not. It's the electronic version of loitering in a corner shop all day browsing magazine titles. At university, there's yet another problem. With no spouse to keep you in check (and threaten divorce) there's no-one to stop you from spending hours in front of the thing. So hours turn into days, and then you can't sleep as you haven't physically done \*anything\*. I know one other person who has reverted to dialup. It's the sporadic nature of the internet, which we DSL users have kissed goodbye, that we really miss.

**George Preston, Chelmsford**

What a refreshing article. I've just been served notice by my ISP that due to 'overuse' (ie my p2p use) they will be terminating my broadband account. I was going to subscribe to another service, but reading this, and having to deal with a week of PC downtime at home during which i've found other things to do with my surf time, has made me realise that maybe I too have become an 'info addict'. Although it had the advantage of freeing up the phoneline, maybe just maybe I'll now consider going back to slow old dial-up, after all, I lived with it for 4 years, I can live with it again!

**A Dunn, Bristol**

This article has shed some light on the reality of what broadband is really used for. I regularly use P2P software, and so do 95% of people i know. As broadband has become so affordable, and the music industry continues to fleece the public and produce more low quality music (or reuse old music, eg. elvis) I will continue to use broadband to its full potential, which includes downloading music i want to listen to, rather than the overpriced rubbish that the music industry tries to force in my face.

**Anon, UK**

£30 per month? you've been had matey. I pay around £17 per month, which isn't an awful lot more than I was paying for my monthly dialup. And it means I can download whatever I want, whenever I want, without waiting....!

**Phil J, London....**

So true - I'm currently revising for exams and 'reward' myself with a few minutes checking the news and my email, only to find that i've wasted another half an hour. Is there such a thing as too much information I wonder?

**Scott, London**

The main reason I have broadband is simple - Online gaming. There is no way today's online games can be played on 56k tech. If you keep getting divorce threats I suggest you buy your spouse a second computer - Then you can spend too much time playing online games together.

**Jonathan, Reading, UK**

Try doing the same with TV, it's even more refreshing. you'll miss stuff, sure, but nothing that is actually important for a fulfilled life. It's all in books and on the radio anyway. Admittedly a great many people use the Internet/TV

as a convenient way of not having to face up to their poor verbal communication skills, but hey! it's not too late to re-learn

**tom, Leamington Spa**

David's story mirrors my life exactly. Except I am hopelessly addicted and cannot quit. I've tried cold turkey, I've tried weening. I just can't pull myself away from the web! I seriously need help.

**Alistair, Fife**

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