

DSL ARRIVES

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Recently announced alliances between AOL (America On Line) and GTE and Pacific Bell will make DSL (Digital Subscriber Lines) available to a much larger portion of the United States by fall 1999. This may be the spark that really kicks the world-wide-web into high gear. While the benefits of the internet are undeniable, many people complain about the slow speeds of access, even when using the newest 56 Kpbs modems. Well, get ready for DSL. DSL not only boast speeds more than 160 times faster than a 56 Kbps modem, it may be used on existing telephone lines. That is because it uses a high-frequency portion of the telephone lines that is exclusively used for digital transmissions.

To understand where this speed comes from, a little background is necessary. A modem is a device that is used to convert your computer's digital data to analog format so it can be transmitted via telephone lines. The data must then be routed through several switching stations, which are necessary for analog communications. The modem on the other end of your transmission must then convert the data back to a digital format so the receiving computer can "read" the data. The DSL digital transmission bypasses all of this, and so travels at a much greater speed.

Another factor that many will consider a plus is that since DSL splits the phone lines into digital and analog portions, you are able to carry on simultaneous voice telephone calls and digital data communications. This eliminates the need for a dedicated data line.

As with most things that offer improvements, there is a cost. It is presently estimated that the initial hardware and installation costs for this cutting edge technology will be between \$200 and \$600. In addition, it is estimated that the monthly line charges for DSL access will likely be double that of a regular internet connection, or approximately \$40 per month. On a personal basis, this may seem extravagant. In a business setting, however, this small outlay will generally be recouped almost immediately by the increased productivity. You can't look simply at the direct costs, you must also look at the "opportunity" cost, the cost of wages for employee time lost in using slower technology.

Many associations should be watching for this, and consider adding DSL capability when it becomes available. For more information about DSL, and to find out if it is available in your area, check out <http://www.xdsl.com>.

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