



**WINNER
VIRGIN.NET**

Being a dial-up ISP is a tough job. This has become all the more obvious over the past year, as the dial-up market has matured to the point of saturation. We were worried that, as profit margins shrank, so would the number of customer support staff and subsequently customer satisfaction.

To test this hypothesis, we asked two simple questions of readers in our dial-up ISP survey: how satisfied are you with your service provider? And, crucially, would you recommend them to others? Although Telewest Blueyonder should take plenty of credit from its results, there could be only one winner this year: Virgin.net.

It's no freak result, either, as Virgin.net won the award last year as well. Once again, you were near-universal in your praise. No less than 87 per cent of respondents were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the connection and services they received, with the company's two dial-up offerings – unmetered and pay-as-you-go – supplemented by a portal offering travel updates, movie reviews and plenty more besides.

But the outstanding result for Virgin.net is that 94 per cent of its users would recommend the company to others – a strong commendation. No-one else could match this, although a highly respectable 80 per cent of FreeUK users and 81 per cent of Telewest Blueyonder's would recommend their ISP.



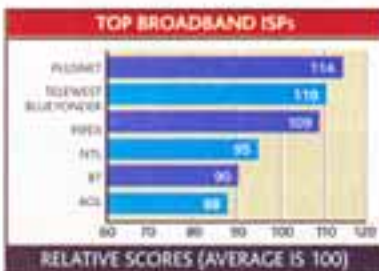
**WINNER
PLUSNET**

It seems like you can't switch on the TV without being bombarded by adverts promoting the benefits of broadband, and we completely agree – download speeds are usually ten times quicker than with a dial-up connection, uploads are at least five times as fast, and you can still use your phone line for voice calls.

The question is, how do you choose between the multitude of suppliers? PC Pro readers were keen to promote three broadband suppliers: 93 per cent of Pipex users would recommend the company to others, with 95 per cent advocating PlusNet and 96 per cent preaching the gospel of Telewest Blueyonder. No other suppliers could come close to matching these results.

It was no surprise then that the majority of each of these companies' customers were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the connection and services they received. No less than 93 per cent of Telewest Blueyonder's users were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with this aspect of their ISP's performance, with Pipex gaining a similarly impressive 92 per cent commendation.

But what stunned us was the sheer number of people who weren't just 'satisfied' with PlusNet's service but 'very satisfied'. An eye-opening two-thirds of its users gave PlusNet this accolade and, in doing so, handed the company PC Pro's prestigious Best Broadband ISP Award.



**WINNER
CRUCIAL**

The Online Vendor of the Year Award gets more nominations every year, with nearly 14,000 votes cast this time, up from just under 11,000 in 2002. Whether customers use them for convenience or to save a few pounds, Net retailers are becoming a more popular source of goods, particularly for IT equipment.

However, we know from the continual feedback we receive from readers that, at times, the online buying process can be stressful. There are heroes and villains in this market. That's why this year we asked you to give an indication of your experience with each of the suppliers you used, rather than just nominate one company each. This year's survey asked you to justify your choice by giving each vendor a mark for the ordering process, delivery, accuracy and punctuality, and customer service.

Lots of familiar names were placed highly, including Play, Amazon and dabs.com, but this year's award went to Crucial Technology. The company, which specialises in memory upgrades, portable media and graphics cards, won by a clear margin.

An impressive 96 per cent of customers said Crucial's website was easy to use, 98 per cent backed the company's delivery process, and 94 per cent were pleased with customer service. In fact, Crucial won top marks on all three counts.

Tesco also deserves a mention for breaking into the IT-heavy top six.

