

## **Broadband and the Small Business**

*Broadband is good for small businesses because it makes them think about their use of Internet technology generally and this may well be the greatest benefit of the Broadband roll-out, suggests **Dr. James Griffin, Tipperary Institute.***

Beware of the headlong rush to adopt Broadband. Sit back. Take a breath. Have a cup of coffee. Small businesses get pushed around enough by large business partners and the market in general. Decisions about what technologies to use and how to use them are somewhere that a small business can and should exercise at least some control.

Broadband is the perfect example of a technology that needs thought. It is what I would call a ‘facilitating technology’. In other words it helps your business do what it does more efficiently. So small businesses beware: Broadband will not change your core business activity. It will, however, allow you to conduct more efficient transactions over the Web, provided you ask the right questions of course.

Currently, many small firms are asking questions about broadband. Questions like: How much will it cost? What form of broadband should I get? When can I get access to broadband services? But the first questions that a business should be asking regarding any technology are: Why do I need it and how will it feed the bottom line? You will only be able to answer these questions if you know how your business currently uses the Internet. So start there. Be critical and while you’re having that cup of coffee think about what your business actually does with the Internet at the moment.

You could be using the Internet for a variety of business purposes. Generally they will fall into some of the following categories: Improving sales and entering new markets, Improving access to suppliers and relationships with suppliers, Improving or varying customer service and/or Managing your internal business activities and communications.

When you’ve identified what your business actually does with the Internet it will become more evident whether or not broadband will benefit you at this point in time. Remember, the key features of broadband are its increased speed and the fact that it’s ‘always on’. These features mean that activities that are either ‘Automated’ (like daily emailings or online procurement systems) or ‘Time Sensitive’ (involving the constant or regular downloading of large files from other sites on a 24-hour basis) will be facilitated by broadband. You will see efficiencies immediately when you apply broadband technology to such activities.

If, however, your current Internet activities involve either others accessing information on your site (i.e. if your site is mostly advertisement), or are once-off activities like general information searching or activities that happen once a month or once a week (like online banking or travel bookings) then the true benefits of broadband will not come to you.

Many small businesses are in the latter category. They use the Internet for information rather than time-sensitive activities and that’s fine. But if your business falls into this category then this may be a signal for you to re-examine your use of the Internet.

Examine potential uses for the Internet in some of the 'Automated' or 'Time Sensitive' categories mentioned above and see if there are potential cost savings or competitive advantages to be gained. Then, when you've moved into these areas, get the broadband in and see true efficiencies begin to accumulate. As I say, broadband will facilitate your business, just make sure it facilitates the activities that you want it to.

Further broadband information and website links can be found at [www.tipperary.com/broadband](http://www.tipperary.com/broadband) where previous broadband articles are also available.