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GAMERS SHOT DOWN BY LACK OF BROADBAND FIREPOWER

- 40% using substandard broadband connection, affecting online gaming performance
 - Over a third at risk of running up higher data bills
- Over half paying extra for gaming add-ons potentially adding up to £240 per year

Slow broadband could be damaging the multiplayer performance of millions of gamers in the UK, according to new research¹ by Ofcom-accredited broadbandchoices.co.uk.

The study, which questioned 1,000 online gaming enthusiasts, found that 40% are using broadband packages with download speeds of 20Mbps or below, whilst almost half (43%) didn't know what their upload speed was – potentially causing delays in gameplay. Those playing with optimum broadband speeds could gain an advantage when playing fast-paced, first person shooter or sports games.

It follows the launch of two of the biggest online multiplayer games this year: Call of Duty: Black Ops 2, which is expected to be bought by over three million British gamers; and Microsoft's Halo 4 which took a record \$220m sales on its first day of release.

The broadbandchoices.co.uk survey also found that a third of those questioned are playing online with monthly download limits of less than 30GB, leaving them at risk of being charged excess usage fees by their provider. A quarter of respondents did not even know what their data allowance was. Online gaming, combined with other downloads such as movies and catch-up TV, could quickly breach download limits and trigger higher fees. Excess data is typically priced at around £1 per GB through a landline-based connection, which can quickly rack up with the growing trend for game companies to release 'patches' for gamers to download on a regular basis. When using a mobile broadband connection, these charges can skyrocket further.

In the survey, most gamers were found to have an average 'ping time' – the length of time taken for a games console to send a message to a network and receive a reply – of over 70ms, well above the recommended time of 40ms or less.

Dominic Baliszewski, of broadbandchoices.co.uk, says: "The gaming industry is changing at a rapid rate, but broadband connections are not keeping up. Whilst gamers can get online from speeds as low as 4Mbps, in today's modern household we recommend a broadband speed of over 20Mbps with a low ping time of 30ms and an unlimited monthly data allowance.

“This will ensure players are not left waiting hours to download game software, as well as avoiding connection hiccups resulting from other people in the house using bandwidth through services like Skype or iPlayer at the same time. They will also avoid any nasty excess download fees or speed throttling, leaving players free to concentrate on taking out their opponent!”

“Gamers tend to be far pickier with their broadband than most customers, so we were shocked at how many enthusiasts are not equipped with a fast connection for high performance play. Selecting the correct broadband package can cut down on lag and could actually give an advantage when playing large multiplayer games like Call of Duty. Any gamer experiencing problems and hasn’t reviewed their broadband package in a while should check what deals are [available in their postcode](#) first. Availability varies by region, so where you live has a massive impact on what you will pay and how fast you can go. You could find you are able to upgrade to a much faster service and unlimited data package whilst saving money in the process.”

The research also revealed that well over half (63%) of gamers are spending up to £20 extra per month for extra downloadable content, such as expansions, maps, alternative costumes and upgrades. The increasing trend for game makers to offer expensive extras could potentially hit the pockets of players twice – firstly through the initial cost of the add-on, then once again if the data consumption leads to a penalty fee from providers.

Top broadband tips for gamers

- 1. Speed, speed, speed:** Gamers can get online with speeds as low as 4Mbps, but there are a lot of factors to consider beyond just game play. A slow broadband speed can mean it will take hours to download your chosen game and if you purchase game add-ons and patches, etc, you will also have to wait for these to download before being able to use them, which can get very frustrating. A faster speed of over 20Mbps can also cope better with multiple users online at the same time – so don’t let your housemate’s iPlayer addiction get you booted off the server!
- 2. Latency and contention ratios:** Your broadband connection is also dependent on latency (the speed with which information is sent between the host server and your console). Lower latency means your reaction time in-game will be improved, so keep an eye on this along with your contention ratio (the number of local users sharing the same connection as you – less people on the same connection means fewer ‘traffic jams’).
- 3. Opt for all-you-can-eat:** If you are streaming HD game trailers, downloading new releases and game add-ons on a regular basis you are better off choosing a package with an unlimited data allowance to avoid high excess usage fees. Also check the small print for any fair usage policy as this allows your provider to throttle your speed during peak usage times – this will greatly hinder gameplay. Sky is currently the only major provider to offer ‘truly unlimited’ broadband with no fair usage policy.

- 4. Check the hardware:** The majority of providers now offer good quality free routers to all new customers, which is good news if your current set-up is looking a little tired. However if you have your own router (e.g: one that allows port prioritising) and want to keep using it, remember that you may not be guaranteed free repairs if you experience any technical issues, as providers will only cover repairs of the equipment that they have given to you.

- Ends -

Notes to editors

¹ Online research carried out by OnePoll on behalf of broadbandchoices.co.uk, 2nd November 2012. 1000 gaming enthusiasts were questioned on their broadband speeds, download limits and gaming habits.

For further information please contact:

Emily Church

PR Manager

020 7400 7403

About Us:

broadbandchoices.co.uk is a free, impartial and award winning price comparison site with over 50 staff based in central London.

We are the UK's number 1, Ofcom accredited comparison company for fixed line communications services - broadband, home phone and digital TV.

Our broadband and home phone comparison services have the much sought after Ofcom accreditation, and our spokespeople are widely quoted in the national press and broadcast media.

Our website attracts over 1.8 million visitors per month, and every month we help thousands of customers find better deals on their broadband, phone and digital TV services.

Our white label programme provides the cutting-edge technology behind some of the biggest names in the comparison market including: Comparethemarket.com, Confused.com and GoCompare.com.