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While there is an overwhelming number of broadband options available on the market today, it's easy to get confused over which is the best type for you. Lots of providers will offer 'superfast' broadband connections, which are likely to be fibre optic packages. Fibre optic broadband offers speeds up to 40Mb, 50Mb and even 100Mb, which is much faster than the typical speeds offered by cable packages.

The majority of fibre-optic broadband connections make use of a technology which is called 'fibre-to-the-cabinet', or FTTC. This means that the fibre-optic cables are only used as far as your nearest "green box"™, while the rest of the connection uses standard cables. The fibre-optic cabling as far as the green box will make a big difference, though it does mean that the distance between your house and the green box will affect the speed of your connection. The further away your nearest green box is from your house, the more copper cabling will be used, and the slower your connection will subsequently be.

In contrast, standard cable broadband consists of copper cabling " or a similar alternative " all the way. This, of course, means that your broadband speeds will invariably be much slower than they would with a fibre-optic connection, with many of the cheapest advertised packages offering speeds as low as 10Mb. However, most people in the UK still connect to the internet with standard cables, for several reasons. Firstly, the sort of speed afforded by fibre-optic cables is not necessary for most internet users. Secondly, fibre-optic connections are not available everywhere in the UK.

Finally, the cost of a standard broadband internet connection is much lower than the cost of superfast internet. Many providers will offer standard broadband for between five and ten pounds a month, whereas superfast connections often cost upwards of £15 a month. Considering that superfast broadband isn't a necessity for the majority of home internet users, this additional charge of over £100 a year may be hard to justify.

Of course, neither fibre-optic nor standard broadband can guarantee you a specific speed. Your broadband speed can be affected by a number of variables, and will rarely match the top speeds advertised by your broadband provider. The primary factor which will alter the speed of your broadband connection if you opt for standard cabling is the distance your house is from the nearest telephone exchange; in other words, this is the length that your connection has to travel from the exchange before it reaches your house.

Telecoms regulator Ofcom has found that, on average, a major internet provider's fibre-optic network will deliver broadband at 78% of its advertised top speed, in comparison with just 45% on the slower broadband connection. While this means that standard cable broadband services are much slower than fibre-optic, superfast and infinity broadband services, they often still manage to deliver high enough speeds to satisfy the majority of users.

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