

## Connecting to and using the Internet

The Internet is a large series of networked computers that can be accessed publicly. These networks allow you to access services such as the world wide web, email and online chat. To access the internet you need a suitable computer, a modem, antivirus software and a plan from an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Most ISPs have a minimum requirement for your computer to run at least Windows 2000. They recommend this as older versions of Windows do not provide protection against hackers or viruses as Microsoft no longer creates updates for these older versions. I recommend Windows XP as it is more user friendly, and if it is regularly maintained with Microsoft updates and a good antivirus program it is secure against hackers and viruses. I also recommend upgrading to Internet Explorer 7. This program provides additional security to your computer as it has a built in filter that checks on webpages before you visit them. It checks they are legitimate and that they will not breach your personal security by stealing your bank details from your computer. Your computer should have at least a 500MHz processor and 512mb RAM. The processor and the RAM determine how quickly your computer performs each task. Programs necessary for the internet use a lot of your computer system's resources, so to ensure your computer operates at a normal speed when you are online you should have at least these minimum requirements.

ISP charge monthly for accessing the internet. The amount you are charged depends on the type of plan you are on. Types of plans include: Dialup, ADSL Broadband, Wireless Broadband or Satellite Broadband. Dial-up is relatively slow and it occupies your phone line when you are on the internet. ADSL Broadband is the type of access preferred for everyday internet users. It is faster and more convenient than Dial-Up as you can use the phone while you are on the internet. The added convenience compensates for the higher price. If you are often away from home travelling and you take your computer with you, Wireless Broadband would be the best option. It doesn't require a phone line, instead it uses Bigpond Next G mobile phone coverage to access the internet from many places across Australia. Satellite Broadband is mainly used in locations where you cannot get ADSL or Wireless. This is the type of connection used on farms and in remote parts of the country. Satellite broadband can be expensive but there is a Government subsidy available meaning

if you cannot access ADSL Broadband or Wireless Broadband, you can receive Satellite Broadband for the price of ADSL.

Plans have different bandwidths and speeds. The bandwidth is a limit on the amount you can upload and download. If you are on a low bandwidth plan you will go over your limit very easy if you visit sites with lots of pictures. The basic user would manage with a bandwidth of 500MB to 1GB but if you do lots of large downloads including music, photos or videos you may require 5GB or more per month. The faster the speed the more convenient the internet will be to use as data will download and display more quickly. If you are uploading lots of files you will require a fast upload speed. The speed at which you can upload and download will influence the price of your plan; the faster your plan the more expensive it will be, therefore you will need to determine what is more important for you personal situation. You can determine the upload and download speed by looking at the plan details. For example 512/512 is 512kilobit per second download and 512kilobit per second upload. Most basic users will find that a 256/64kb plan will be sufficient. This type of basic plan starts at around \$30 a month.

Before you get on the internet you will need an antivirus program to protect data on your computer from viruses. There are some good free versions available such as AVG and Avast which offer basic protection. You can buy the full versions of AVG and Avast with firewall, anti-spam and antivirus. Ensure your computer has current Microsoft updates. You can take your computer to the CTC and we will do this for you, or you can do this yourself when you are online. Updates help protect you online by repairing security holes which hackers may use to access your computer.

There are many practical things you can do on the internet as well as it being a source of entertainment.

The internet is a great way to promote your business's products or services and attract customers from outside the region. There are several webhosting companies that offer affordable webspace, which is where your website is stored on the internet and domain names, which is the address to access your website. A good Australian webhosting

company is Webcity <http://www.webcity.com.au>. On your website you can display information about your business or establish an online store. An online store may provide an additional outlet for your business's products. EBay stores are an easy way to establish an online shop and you can incorporate links to ebay from your website. It is a simple process and eBay provides online support during the setup.

The RTA website <http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/> allows you to research road rule changes for cars, bikes and heavy vehicles including changes to log book requirements for truck drivers during the coming harvest. You can use the RTA website to check you demerit points, order vehicle plates and pay your vehicle registration.

The Centrelink website <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/> allows you to check the eligibility criteria for different government benefits and to apply for them online.

Online banking is a popular task many people complete on the internet. Online banking saves you time allowing you to transfer funds at any time of the day or night. It also saves money with cheaper bank fees associated with online accounts and transactions compared with conventional bank accounts. You can apply for personal loans, credit cards and home loans which provides convenience if you live far from these services. Check with your bank for specific information on their online accounts.

Elders Weather <http://www.eldersweather.com.au/> is a good weather forecast website. You can view warnings, forecasts, weather charts, satellite and radar maps or historic weather patterns for all areas of Australia including central west NSW.

Wikipedia is an online encyclopaedia <http://wikipedia.org/>. It has entries about nearly all topics and although anybody can contribute information, the site is regularly monitored to ensure only accurate information is displayed.

One of the most popular things people do on the internet is catching up with friends. This is done through email, online chat such as windows live messenger, or social networking websites such as facebook. Emails are a rapid way of sending mail which can include

information such as pictures or documents. Messenger is a version of email between two or more people who are on the internet at the same time, files can be sent through messenger much the same as an email however you can also play games, view each other's webcams, talk to each other via a microphone and share files whenever you are online. Social networking websites such as facebook allow multiple people within a specific group to communicate with one another at the same time and to view up to date information on each other. Links to Grenfell facebook pages are available at <http://www.grenfell.org.au/links.htm>. Facebook is a great ways to keep in touch with friends who have moved away or to find those friends you haven't heard from in years!

Family history is a popular online activity and the internet has a lot of databases from all over the world. <http://www.familysearch.org> is a free website for researching family history around the world. Another site <http://www.ancestry.com.au/> requires membership before access to the information is granted. Like all things, you get what you pay for. The sites which charge membership provide access to a larger variety of information compared to free websites.

When you are surfing the internet it is necessary to take some safety precautions. Check out our website [www.grenfell.org.au/techtips](http://www.grenfell.org.au/techtips) and view our previous 'Web Wise' and 'Buying Online' articles. On the internet people can claim to be someone they are not and children may find it difficult to identify a friend from a predator. Many unlikely websites contain adult content. If children are using the internet, it is a good idea to place the computer somewhere you are able to monitor their activities.

Nowadays mobile phones do more than just make and receive phone calls; they can take pictures and videos which can be uploaded to the internet. The CTC will soon begin free classes on how to use mobile phones. The classes will start off with the basics of how to turn on the phone and how to make and receive calls. All classes will be kept small to ensure sufficient personal attention. The end goal is to have some participants able to upload videos on the internet. If you are interested in learning more about mobile phones, register your name with Josh in the CTC@ Grenfell as these free classes will start soon.

If you require more information on using the internet on your own computer or if you would like to access the internet through the Grenfell internet café, drop in and see Josh in the clock tower building in Main Street or call him on 6343 1720.