



3rd July 2007

**CUSTOMER SERVICE? MORE LIKE LIP SERVICE, SAYS USWITCH.COM,
ANNOUNCING THE RESULTS OF THE UK'S LEADING INDEPENDENT HOME
PHONE AND BROADBAND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION REPORT**

*Free broadband is old news – this year it's all about customer service, according to the providers at least. Yet despite endless promises that customers are now in for a better time, a new consumer poll by uSwitch.com reveals that 'this ain't happening yet', as **broadband satisfaction continues to tumble.***

- **Empty promises** - a quarter (25%) of customers are not satisfied with their broadband provider, a 3% decline in satisfaction since October^[1]
- **Small is beautiful** – Plusnet leapfrogs the big boys to win the crown of Best Overall Provider with 78% of customers satisfied
- **Biggest loser** – consumers place Orange at the bottom for the second time running with 400,000 customers (35%) not satisfied^[2]
- **All TalkTalk** – massive investment has yet to pay dividends as TalkTalk satisfaction drops a further 1% - just 69% of customers are satisfied^[3] placing it second to bottom in the poll
- **Tie-break** – round 1 of the Murdoch versus Branson battle for happy customers ends in a tie-break as Sky and Virgin Media come joint second with AOL^[4]
- **Home phone happiness** – almost 8 out of 10 (78%) customers are satisfied, a 4% rise since October^[5] with Tiscali at the top (87%) and Virgin Media at the bottom (76%)
- **Deal or no deal** – consumers vote BT best for customer support (62%) but worst for value for money – over 4 million BT customers do not believe they are getting a good deal^[6]

Broadband companies may be 'talking the talk', but have yet to 'walk the walk', according to the latest home phone and broadband Customer Satisfaction Report, announced today by uSwitch.com, the independent online comparison and switching service. The UK's most comprehensive report into customer satisfaction, based on responses from nearly 9,000

home phone and nearly 11,000 broadband customers shows that, despite promises from companies that things are on the up, customers have yet to see any signs of improvement. In fact, while home phone customer satisfaction is up by 4%^[5], broadband satisfaction has continued to plummet and for the first time, **a quarter of customers (25%) are not satisfied with their broadband provider**^[1]. Standards have dropped by 3% since October 2006 and 10%^[7] since March 2006, the last survey before 'free' broadband was launched.

Best broadband – Plusnet, having experienced a severe drop of 16%^[8] last year following a raft of service issues, has sprung back to take top position in the broadband survey. Nearly 8 out of 10 (78%) customers are now satisfied with its service. Plusnet, the smallest company in the survey with just 2%^[9] of the market, was bought by BT last November, and this year celebrated its 10th birthday with a wave of new offers including free set up and hardware for new customers.

Worst broadband – Orange and TalkTalk, together owning 14% of the market with over 2 million customers^[9], have failed to pull themselves out of the bottom two spots in the league. Orange comes last for the second time running with just 65% of customers satisfied. It has seen its satisfaction rating drop 18%^[10] over the last 14 months - uncannily around the same time that it launched 'free' broadband^[11] – and experienced a recent blow when the Advertising Standards Authority found it guilty of misleading consumers in its advertising. Meanwhile, TalkTalk has yet to reap the rewards of its £15 million^[12] investment into customer service. Just 69% of its customers are satisfied, a drop of 1% since October, despite its own assurances that connection queues have disappeared and call centre waiting times have shortened. The performance of both companies suggests that 'free' does not necessarily ensure happiness, as the customers paying for their broadband appear to be happier than the ones who are not.

Home phone winners and losers – Tiscali has come top for the second time running with nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) customers satisfied. Virgin Media comes bottom with 76% of customers satisfied, an amalgamation of good and bad legacies following last year's merger: in October Telewest came top of the poll (80%) while ntl came bottom (70%). The results of the home phone survey show a trade-off between value for money and customer support. While TalkTalk holds the top spot for value with 2.3 million customers (76%) satisfied, it comes bottom for customer support – just 1.4 million customers (41%) are satisfied with the level of support they receive^[13]. BT, on the other hand, tops the customer support category with 6.5 million customers (62%) satisfied, but comes bottom in the value stakes with 60% satisfied: over 4 million BT customers do not believe they are getting a good deal^[14].

Chris Frost, communications expert at uSwitch.com, comments: “This time last year, free broadband was a novelty. Customers signed up by the masses to experience the broadband phenomenon, often for the first time. Now it has become a life essential, so when things go wrong, they usually go badly wrong. Unlike last year’s survey when providers were in many cases simply overwhelmed by demand, this year the problems are more technical. New advances in broadband technology appear to be having an adverse effect, with connection problems and service interruptions occurring all too frequently. Customers have found themselves having to make numerous phone calls to get their problems fixed and this would explain why the score for overall technical support has dropped 11%^[15] since March 2006.”

For the first time, the uSwitch.com survey has interviewed the broadband customers of Sky and Virgin Media. Despite the on-going spat between the two providers, both claiming to offer a better deal than the other, the results astonishingly show the two media giants coming neck and neck with a score of 76%, placing them in second place alongside AOL. While Sky takes a clear victory for ‘value for money’, scoring 83% compared to Virgin Media’s 68%, its customers are far from happy with the level of support they receive. Just 48% of customers are satisfied with customer support and a meagre 42% are satisfied with the technical support – compared to Virgin Media’s 55% and 53% respectively. The survey also suggests that Sky needs to improve the clarity of its bills: customers find them the least ‘easy to understand’, coming bottom of this category with a score of 68%.

Frost continues: “While Sky customers are obviously happy with their deal in terms of value for money, the fact that less than half are satisfied with the support they receive is a real sting in the tail. The phased approach that the company has taken to processing orders could have contributed to this score. Customers have complained of registering for Sky broadband, informing their existing provider of their plans to leave, and then being forced to wait a number of weeks without any broadband at all before being connected to their new service.

“Virgin Media also has a long way to go to improve satisfaction. Its overall score of 76% is a way off the impressive 85% scored by Virgin.net, winner of last October’s poll. Virgin Media has pledged to place customer service ‘at the heart of the business’ and last year reported that it had invested £10 million, hired 300 extra customer service employees and improved its customer service training^[16]. However, as the situation stands at the moment, 1 million cable customers are not satisfied with their phone service^[17] and 820,000 are not satisfied with their broadband^[18].”

In the meantime, TalkTalk and AOL, both owned by the Carphone Warehouse, are currently sitting at two ends of the spectrum and are being positioned as separate brands – a ‘no frills’ and a ‘premium’. CEO Charles Dunstone will need to consider whether it makes sense to maintain this strategy, or ‘do a Virgin Media’ and combine a customer service winner with a loser. Dunstone was quoted in June 2006 as saying ‘I think if in a year’s time it’s still as bad then people will just write us off’^[19]. With a large proportion of free broadband customers now nearing the end of their contract, never a truer word may have been said.

Frost concludes: “It’s great to see Plusnet back on form and its performance puts its larger competitors to shame. The fact that a quarter of customers are not satisfied with their broadband provider should be a distinct warning siren for companies to up their game. Major players, including TalkTalk and BT, vowed that they would reach the top of the customer service league this year^[20]. Is it a case of all TalkTalk, no action?”

“Our message to broadband companies is to stop telling us what you’re doing and actually start doing it. Customers are entitled to the best of both worlds and should not have to choose between price and service. However, while this remains the case, it’s important that the 7 million^[21] home phone and 6 million^[22] broadband customers who are likely to review their existing deal in the next 12 months do their research before entering into a new contract. By comparing both prices and service levels among providers, customers should be able to find the best deal to suit their needs.”

The full results can be viewed at www.uswitch.com where consumers can compare levels of customer service alongside information on cost and potential savings.

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Notes to Editors:

All results based on research conducted by YouGov in May 2007, with analysis conducted by uSwitch.com. Sample size in home telephone survey was 8,647 GB adults over 18. Sample size in broadband survey was 10,513 GB adults over 18. Specific reporting of results published for suppliers that received 200 or more responses. The margin of error is between 2 and 4%, variable between suppliers.

1. 74% of people surveyed are satisfied overall with their broadband provider, compared to 77% in October 2006 YouGov survey.
2. 65% of Orange broadband customers are satisfied with their service, 35% are not. Orange has 1.139 million customers according to its company report.
3. 70% of TalkTalk broadband customers were satisfied overall in October 2006.
4. 76% of Sky, Virgin Media and AOL broadband customers are satisfied overall.
5. 78% of people surveyed are satisfied overall with their home telephone service, compared to 74% in October 2006.

6. 60% of BT phone customers are satisfied with the value for money; 39% are not. BT has 10.439 million phone customers according to its company report.
7. 86% of customers were satisfied overall with their service in March 2006 YouGov survey.
8. 92% of Plusnet customers were satisfied in March 2006 compared to 76% of customers in October 2006.
9. Based on customer numbers across broadband industry taken from company reports.
10. 83% of Orange customers satisfied in March 2006 compared to 65% in May 2007.
11. Orange launched a free broadband service in May 2006.
12. Additional broadband customer service costs of £10-15m reported in Carphone Warehouse Group 4th Quarter Trading Update 2nd April 2007.
13. 76% of TalkTalk phone customers satisfied with value for money while 41% satisfied with customer support. TalkTalk has 2.774 million phone customers according to its company report.
14. 62% of BT phone customers satisfied with customer support while 60% satisfied with value for money. BT has 10.439 million phone customers according to its company report.
15. 60% of broadband customers satisfied with overall technical support in March 2006, dropping to 49% in May 2007.
16. Announced by Virgin Media at the launch of its service on 8th February 2007.
17. 76% of Virgin Media phone customers are happy with their service, 23% are not. Virgin Media has 4.245 million home phone customers according to its company report.
18. 76% of Virgin Media broadband customers are happy with their service, 24% are not. Virgin Media has 3.416 million broadband customers according to its company report.
19. Quote taken from Daily Telegraph interview 19/6/06.
20. TalkTalk's promise as quoted in Times interview 27/11/06: "In the new year we will start [customer service] initiatives to put us ahead of everyone." BT's promise as quoted in the Mirror 31/5/07 "Chief Executive Ben Verwaayen has set staff the target of being number one for customer service within two years".
21. 35% of people review their home phone deal quarterly, half-yearly or yearly, equivalent to 7 million out of a total of 19 million home phone customers.
22. 48% of people review their broadband deal quarterly, half-yearly or yearly, equivalent to 6 million out of a total of 13 million broadband customers.

About Us:

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones, personal finance products and car insurance.

Our aim is to help customers take advantage of the best tariffs and services on offer from every supplier. To aid us in this task we have developed a comparison calculator, which evaluates a number of factors including price, location, service and payment method, and advises consumers on the best deal to suit their needs.

The service is also available via fax and post. Fax 020 7233 5933 or write to Customer Services, uSwitch.com, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 0SR, with your postcode and usage details.

uSwitch.com is not a supplier but acts as an independent advisor, giving consumers an impartial view of what's on offer.

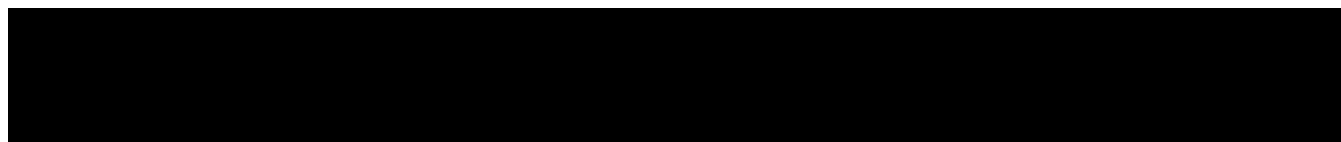
**Winners and losers of the uSwitch Home Telephone Customer Satisfaction Awards
May 2007**

Category	Winner	Loser
Overall customer satisfaction	Tiscali	Virgin Media
Supplier most likely to be recommended	TalkTalk / Tiscali	Virgin Media
Best value for money	TalkTalk	BT
Best customer support	BT	TalkTalk
Best billing services	Tiscali	Virgin Media
Best billing clarity	TalkTalk	Virgin Media
Best online account management	Tiscali	Virgin Media
Best talk and payment plan	TalkTalk	BT
Best for ensuring customers are on the best deal	TalkTalk	BT / Virgin Media
Best for ease of use	Tiscali	BT

Winners and losers of the uSwitch Home Broadband Satisfaction Awards May 2007

Category	Winner	Loser
Overall customer satisfaction	Plusnet	Orange
Supplier most likely to be recommended	Plusnet / Sky	Orange
Best value for money	Sky	BT / Orange
Best customer support	AOL	TalkTalk
Best technical support	AOL	TalkTalk
Best billing clarity	TalkTalk	Sky
Best quality of connection	AOL	Orange / TalkTalk
Best for speed / usage	Virgin Media	Orange
Best for ensuring customers are on the best deal	Sky	Pipex
Best for ease of use	Pipex	TalkTalk
Best information quality during sign up	AOL	TalkTalk

The battle of the giants: Sky vs Virgin Media



May 2006 Home Telephone Customer Satisfaction Scores

	Overall satisfaction						Recommend to a friend					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
BT	72%	4	77%	3	5%	↑1	55%	4	60%	3	5%	↑1
NTL	70%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	80%	2	81%	2	1%	↔	71%	1	67%	1	-4%	↔
Telewest	80%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	65%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	81%	1	87%	1	6%	↔	68%	2	67%	1	-1%	↑1
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	76%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	58%	4	N/A	N/A
	Value for money						Overall customer service					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
BT	58%	5	60%	4	2%	↑1	61%	2	62%	1	1%	↑1
NTL	68%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	84%	1	84%	1	0%	↔	53%	4	52%	4	-1%	↔
Telewest	72%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	70%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	81%	2	82%	2	1%	↔	60%	3	61%	2	1%	↑1
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	68%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	58%	3	N/A	N/A
	Billing services						Easy to understand bills					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
BT	74%	4	75%	3	1%	↑1	78%	4	79%	3	1%	↑1
NTL	67%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	77%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	81%	2	80%	2	-1%	↔	89%	1	88%	1	-1%	↔
Telewest	78%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	87%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	87%	1	81%	1	-6%	↔	89%	1	85%	2	-4%	↓1
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	71%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	78%	4	N/A	N/A
	Online services						Talk and payment plans					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
BT	62%	4	62%	3	0%	↑1	61%	5	67%	4	6%	↑1
NTL	58%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	65%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	66%	3	68%	2	2%	↑1	82%	2	83%	1	1%	↑1
Telewest	70%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	69%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	79%	1	81%	1	2%	↔	83%	1	80%	2	-3%	↓1
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	60%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	68%	3	N/A	N/A
	Satisfaction that on best deal						Overall ease of use					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
BT	44%	4	45%	3	1%	↑1	77%	5	78%	4	1%	↑1
NTL	44%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	89%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	62%	1	62%	1	0%	↔	93%	1	86%	3	-7%	↓2
Telewest	48%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	92%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	52%	2	56%	2	4%	↔	89%	3	92%	1	3%	↑2
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	45%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	88%	2	N/A	N/A

May 2006 Broadband Customer Satisfaction Scores

	Overall satisfaction						Recommend to a friend					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
AOL	76%	5	76%	2	0%	↑3	62%	7	60%	6	-2%	↑1
BT	76%	5	75%	5	-1%	↔	65%	6	61%	3	-4%	↑3
NTL	72%	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	58%	9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orange	70%	9	65%	9	-5%	↔	54%	10	49%	9	-5%	↑1
Pipex	78%	4	72%	6	-6%	↓2	67%	4	61%	3	-6%	↑1
Plusnet	76%	5	78%	1	2%	↑4	67%	4	66%	1	-1%	↑3
Sky	N/A	N/A	76%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	66%	1	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	70%	9	69%	8	-1%	↑1	60%	8	56%	7	-4%	↑1
Telewest	83%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	75%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	80%	3	72%	6	-8%	↓3	69%	3	56%	7	-13%	↓4
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	76%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	61%	3	N/A	N/A
Virgin.net	85%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	70%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Value for money						Overall customer service					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
AOL	61%	8	66%	6	5%	↑2	63%	2	65%	1	2%	↑1
BT	60%	9	59%	8	-1%	↑1	56%	4	55%	3	-1%	↑1
NTL	65%	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51%	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orange	58%	10	59%	8	1%	↑2	46%	9	43%	8	-3%	↑1
Pipex	68%	6	61%	7	-7%	↓1	56%	4	54%	5	-2%	↓1
Plusnet	72%	5	72%	3	0%	↑2	56%	4	59%	2	3%	↑2
Sky	N/A	N/A	83%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	48%	6	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	77%	1	76%	2	-1%	↓1	42%	10	41%	9	-1%	↑1
Telewest	73%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	72%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	76%	2	72%	3	-4%	↓1	53%	7	45%	7	-8%	↔
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	68%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	55%	3	N/A	N/A
Virgin.net	74%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	60%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Overall technical support						Overall billing services					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
AOL	63%	2	62%	1	-1%	↑1	77%	6	74%	5	-3%	↑1
BT	54%	5	53%	3	-1%	↑2	72%	8	71%	8	-1%	↔
NTL	53%	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	79%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orange	43%	9	40%	8	-3%	↑1	77%	6	74%	5	-3%	↑1
Pipex	54%	5	51%	5	-3%	↔	58%	10	74%	5	6%	5
Plusnet	56%	4	57%	2	1%	↑2	84%	4	80%	2	-4%	↑2
Sky	N/A	N/A	42%	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	68%	9	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	37%	10	37%	9	0%	↑1	85%	2	85%	1	0%	↑1
Telewest	72%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	88%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	49%	8	42%	6	-7%	↑2	85%	2	79%	3	-6%	↓1
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	53%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	77%	4	N/A	N/A
Virgin.net	58%	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	72%	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Quality of connection						Speed and usage plans					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
AOL	74%	6	77%	1	3%	↑5	71%	7	77%	2	6%	↑5
BT	82%	3	74%	5	-8%	↓2	72%	6	71%	6	-1%	↔
NTL	79%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	74%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orange	74%	6	66%	8	-8%	↓2	66%	10	65%	9	-1%	↑1
Pipex	83%	2	77%	1	-6%	↑1	68%	9	71%	6	3%	↑3
Plusnet	72%	9	76%	4	4%	↑5	76%	3	75%	4	-1%	↓1
Sky	N/A	N/A	71%	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	77%	2	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	66%	10	66%	8	0%	↑2	70%	8	70%	8	0%	↔
Telewest	87%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	80%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	74%	6	68%	7	-6%	↓1	76%	3	72%	5	-4%	↓2
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	77%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	79%	1	N/A	N/A
Virgin.net	79%	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	77%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Satisfaction that on best deal						Overall ease of use					
	Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)		Oct-06		May-07		Change (06-07)	
	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position	Score	Position
AOL	49%	5	50%	3	1%	↑2	90%	4	86%	2	-4%	↑2
BT	40%	8	40%	7	0%	↑1	86%	7	83%	6	-3%	↑1
NTL	42%	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	86%	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orange	38%	9	34%	8	-4%	↑1	85%	9	81%	7	-4%	↑2
Pipex	34%	10	31%	9	-3%	↑1	91%	3	89%	1	-2%	↑2
Plusnet	51%	2	47%	4	-4%	↓2	93%	1	86%	2	-7%	↓1
Sky	N/A	N/A	62%	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	78%	8	N/A	N/A
TalkTalk	55%	1	53%	2	-2%	↓1	81%	10	66%	9	-15%	↑1
Telewest	49%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	92%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tiscali	51%	2	41%	6	-10%	↓4	89%	5	84%	4	-5%	↑1
Virgin Media	N/A	N/A	45%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	84%	4	N/A	N/A
Virgin.net	51%	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	89%	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A