

TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONCERNS WITH REGARDS TO NBN BROADBAND PROVISION

In recent months I have been researching all facets of the provision of NBN Broadband Services to my residence in Terrigal, NSW. The wide variety of plans and offers from the various providers was, simply, overwhelming. This process was begun with a friend in the outer Newcastle area having to make a decision on an NBN plan for her residence and she asked for my assistance.

1. The extensive list provided by NBN Co. was pages long and listed ALL providers that would connect to the NBN, except it included all FTTP and FTTN providers together without any separation and so it meant extensive research as to which company provided which service as some provided only FTTP, others FTTN and possibly some that only provided FTTN.
2. Researching was assisted by a few companies providing mass mail-outs into the new NBN areas as NBN became available. This pattern was repeated in my own area, but lacked extensive details.
3. In this area began by contacting many of the providers by telephone and often having to leave details and wait for call backs, which never occurred.
4. The few companies that did return calls and the larger telecommunications companies had limited offers - some broadband only or broadband and phone or bundles. Often the broadband and phone were costly, if available.
5. Checking out Telstra and OPTUS in particular discovered they were the only providers offering speeds of 100 /25 and they were parts of "bundles". The costs of these bundles was extremely high.
6. Due to poor reliability and speeds was looking at the faster connections offered as my location is at "the end of the line" and could probably be impacted by other areas upline. Advice was mixed from technical personnel. It was confusing actually.
7. NBN advertisements promised "fast and reliable" internet as per the television advertisements.
8. Experience over a few weeks is anything but fast and reliable and the buffering still continues much the same and even worse!
9. Re one provider from this point on – OPTUS
10. Reviewed what plan(s) would be available to premises and only ONE plan came up – "My Entertainment Plus" with a monthly charge of \$140.00. (iSelect had same results – 1 plan - \$140.00 / month)
11. Inclusions were: Speed Pack 4 – the highest possible and that was up to 100 / 25 MBPS. Included calls: Unlimited standard local calls; unlimited standard national calls; unlimited national calls to mobiles; unlimited international calls to selected countries. Yes TV by Fetch – connect pack; Mighty set-top box; Entertainment Pack with 35+ premium channels.
12. On Tuesday July 19 2016 an OPTUS technician called to discuss what was considered was limiting of the speeds on the service as the maximum available through the router was 28 / 6.4 MBPS and paying for "up to" 100 / 25 MBPS. Actual speeds were much less than those figures given by the router –well below 25% of the 100 / 25 MBPS. Technician told the physical capability of the network – NBN & copper wire in this area was up to 28 / 6.4 MBPS. Why then had they sold a plan that they could not supply was the next question.

13. Dealing with the CRG and apparently they reduced plan to the “My Entertainment” package cutting the monthly cost to \$110.00. Fortunately also received a \$20.00 reduction for having a mobile service. BUT there were no more unlimited international calls to selected countries (one of the things wished to maintain from pre NBN service).
14. Also discovered that ALL 1800.. and 13.. numbers are now charged for each call. They are NOT included in the unlimited calls as listed previously. There are now no more “Free Calls”.
15. Marketing and selling of NBN Plans is deceptive, confusing and full disclosure and correct information is NOT being provided to customers. It amounts to unconscionable conduct as there appears to be a concentration on getting the income in and not providing the services as promised in contracts.
16. The “up to” for speeds does not offer ANY guaranteed speed – you can be on the highest speed plan and get the slowest speed often / most of the time. It is another deception and should not be permitted. A flat minimum speed should be quoted and sold not as it is currently. This applies to ALL providers.
17. Spending many hours over 2 months to get some answers and to wait for return calls (at set times) that never happen also make the experience of dealing with the Telcos more than just frustrating.
18. NBN Co. have been made aware of an average of 4 – 6 line pair changes on this service for 10 years yet Telstra advised there were no issues with copper wire in this area. The provider could provide this detail.
19. The current copper wire network is limited and all providers would be limited to the lower speeds so changing providers is not an option – all contacted providers provided this information.
20. Upstream data transfers are far more consistent but download speeds are “all over the place” with constant buffering and drop outs – an example is trying to use Facetime, over a wired connection where in the first minute up to 6 reconnections have occurred, regularly in the first minute and this means the conversation is very clipped and the constant freezing of images and loss of sound, on a daily basis, is totally unsatisfactory especially when calling elderly parents (over 90!). It is far worse now on NBN than it was before NBN!
21. “Peak Periods” tend to be at varying times and of different lengths – “congestion” is expected to be worst in the afternoon / evening, but it is noted when businesses open and are trading and can fluctuate on a minute to minute basis. Even trying the 0100 – 0600 time frame suggested found it abysmal because many people must have set up downloads for when “everyone would be asleep”, unfortunately that is not so. It has been an ongoing issue for many years and now continues with the NBN FTTN.
22. The Netflix subscription had to be cancelled because watching a program / movie was simply “Hit and Miss” much of the time.
23. Current provider has advised they are considering some of the points re the misrepresentation and deception with sales and marketing :but it takes time” was the response.
24. Getting a provider to advise NBN Co. of the issue is impossible. They will send out replacement routers (the quality of which is extremely questionable) quickly and easily, but it does not solve the basic issue –

constant buffering and poor download speeds every day, at all hours. It goes back to when the technical specialists advised that one should download between 0100 and 0600 to get a good connection, but was never the case. Most of the time you just have (had) to wait and put up with the constant buffering. It is difficult to watch a movie without regular breaks "to catch up" with the download. When it is "flying" it is great but most of the time it is buffering.

25. ALL equipment (computers, routers, cables, etc.) have been replaced a number of times with no improvements. Apple & Windows computers still have the same results. The premises were also totally re-cabled – no improvement noted and multiple visits by technicians over extended time frames.
26. Mobile coverage in this area can be good but it can also be poor and sometimes both the NBN (ADSL2+) have been poor at the same time as the mobile. It has been noted as a "blackspot" in the past because of inconsistency of connection signal. No signal or 1 bar and there is no internet connection.

The whole experience – pre, and current as well as future NBN is a nightmare of deception, misrepresentation, extensive periods of telephone calls, not returned calls, even having made specific appointments (on one occasion an email was sent with an opening of "on which Friday were you going to call?". It did prompt an immediate response but was not convenient. The only way responses were finally received included contact with the TIO and a letter sent to the CEO of the company because the listed telephone number at their headquarters campus simply rings out. The service here was often better on ADSL+ than on NBN, even though it was abysmal with congestion issues and often not even being able to use the telephone line as well as the internet.

I have travelled around the world and found the internet in other countries far more reliable and consistent than in Australia which is lagging far behind. Countries like, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Chile and even Brazil (in Rio & Sao Paulo) are so superior to the internet in Australia. I am talking about 2009, 2013 and 2014. It is now 2016 and we are nowhere near where they were years ago.