

Sustainable Broadband

The Economic, Environmental and Social Impacts of actnow
A Brief Overview of a Report by Professor Peter James and Dr Peter Hopkinson
University Of Bradford and SustainIT



“Broadband has enabled faster
and more efficient sales”

“Broadband has enabled me to work mainly
from home, reducing travel times and costs”

“In this age of everything needing to
be done yesterday, broadband gives
the answer almost immediately
without having to waste time”

Broadband is creating 'triple bottom line' benefits for Cornwall

INTRODUCTION

In April 2005 **actnow**, in collaboration with project partner BT, commissioned SustainIT and the University of Bradford to conduct an online survey of the impacts of broadband on businesses in Cornwall.

The survey received 433 responses from **actnow**'s business customers. The results show that broadband is benefiting enterprises, individuals, the Cornish economy, society and the natural environment by, for example:

- **Extending market reach and impact**
- **Making organisational working practices more efficient**
- **Enabling staff to work flexibly**
- **Substituting travel and meetings with electronic communication – thus reducing traffic congestion and fuel use.**

Some specific findings are:

Over 94% of respondents report that the effects of broadband on their business are positive, with 68% saying that they are highly positive.

An overwhelming majority of respondents say that broadband has positive impacts on business performance (91%), relationships with customers (87%), as well as job satisfaction and skills of staff (74%).

Many respondents also feel that broadband has positive impacts on areas which create both environmental and economic benefit - reducing the amount of paper/materials used (55%), reducing commuting and/or business travel (49%), and reducing the amount of office space needed (34%).

A significant minority of respondents feel that broadband has positive impacts on the important social areas of health and safety (24%) and employment/promotion of women and people with disabilities/illness (13%).

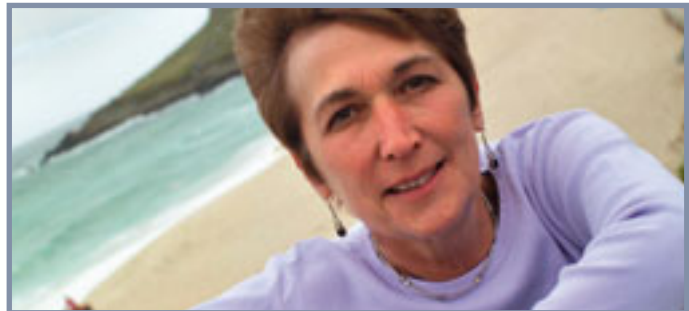
Less than 4% feel that broadband had any negative impacts.

90% of respondents expect to get continued benefits – and 45% considerable benefit - from broadband.

The full report can be downloaded from www.actnowcornwall.co.uk/research.asp



/BED, BROADBAND AND BREAKFAST/



"I can respond so much more quickly to customer enquiries because I check my email more frequently. This increases bookings - many customers have said that they have chosen St. Crida because of my rapid response. Broadband also saves me a lot of time through online ordering of supplies. I never did this before because it took ages on dial-up, and people couldn't get through if my phone was engaged."

- Tina Evison, St Crida B&B, St Ives

/actnow/

actnow is a £20m project, part funded by the EU through Objective One, which has spearheaded the growth of broadband amongst businesses in Cornwall. Launched in 2002, the project has so far helped over 6000 businesses in Cornwall make the most of broadband through a unique combination of free expert advice and financial help (www.actnowcornwall.co.uk).

/SustainIT/

SustainIT is an independent, not-for-profit, research organisation focusing on the economic, environmental and social impacts of communications technologies (www.sustainit.org).

Most actnow customers are gaining multiple business benefits from broadband

Amongst the 91% of respondents who identified very positive impacts from broadband:

- 93% say they benefit from better access to information
- 87% say broadband enables them to present a more professional image
- 80% have seen a fall in telephony costs
- 80% have benefited from improved relationships with customers
- 76% have seen a reduction in mail and printing costs
- 66% have improved their customer base
- 45% are reorganising work practices as a result of broadband - which experts say is crucial to gain the full advantages of information and communication technologies (ICT)
- 49% feel that their performance improvements are having a tangible impact on profitability.

These findings support **actnow** research which estimates that the project has created or safeguarded 2200 jobs and made a £50 million impact on Cornwall's GDP.

BROADBAND IS BRINGING CORNISH BUSINESS CLOSER TO CUSTOMERS AND SUPPLIERS

51% of survey respondents feel that their business suffers from Cornwall's remote location. Of these:

- 87% believe that broadband is having a positive effect on overcoming this challenge.
- 39% believe that broadband's shrinking of distance has tangible effects on business success through
 - better and faster communication with customers
 - cheaper and quicker transfer of electronic data
 - creating a more up to date image
 - being 'plugged in' to a wider range of networks
 - reaching broader markets.

“Broadband shows people it's about the skill set of a company not their location”



“We now export worldwide and were it not for broadband I would probably not have explored the possibility of selling abroad”

/ANIMATING A WEB OF SUCCESS IN ST JUST /



Spider Eye, a St Just based digital animation company, moved its business from Soho to Cornwall in 2001. Director Erica Darby believes that the move “has cut our rent by 98% and increased our quality of life by not much less. Broadband not only allowed us to keep our existing clients, but to find others much further afield. We worked with a client in Germany and collaborators in Italy and Spain on a feature film last year and never met any of them in person! All the material was exchanged via ftp and email. This was £200,000 worth of work which we couldn't have taken on without high bandwidth.”

Environmental impacts are positive on balance

49% of respondents feel that broadband is having a positive effect in reducing commuting and/or business travel. Amongst these:

- 61% say that broadband is reducing in-work travel
- 37% say that staff in their company have changed their commuting times as a result of broadband (of especial benefit in the summer when Cornish roads are more congested)
- 32% are making greater use of video conferencing as a result of broadband.

Many respondents also identified two other 'win win' business and environmental benefits:

- Reducing the amount of paper/materials used (55%)
- Reducing office space needs (34%).

However, the survey found that 69% of respondents are leaving computers switched on for longer, and that many have purchased additional equipment (from 23% for printers to 46% for routers) as a result of broadband.

The increase in energy use arising from these changes will sometimes be offset by reduced or avoided consumption resulting from replacement of old by newer, more energy efficient, equipment and/or the 10-40 times increase in bandwidth which broadband provides. The survey results also indicate that this extra bandwidth will usually create economic benefit so that broadband is generally an eco-efficient investment. Nonetheless, **actnow** is taking action to try to minimise ICT-related energy consumption in its customers, and is preparing guidance materials on the topic.

/CONVEYANCING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT/



Falmouth solicitors, Preston Goldburn, runs a Virtual Private Network linking their two offices and the homes of 50% of their staff who are now working remotely from their homes. Senior Partner Henry Preston, one of Cornwall's leading commercial solicitors, finds that "working from home means that I can concentrate more effectively on long commercial and legal documents whilst broadband means that I am still instantly available to the office, as well as giving me quick and easy access to a variety of online

legal resources. Broadband has also allowed us to register with the Land Registry Pilot into electronic conveyancing, which will be introduced in 2007 and so our firm will be in the forefront of these developments". Henry Preston also noted how his broadband-enabled office has allowed four of his female staff to continue working after starting families. He said "We invested a lot in their training, and now they can all continue to be key members of our team whilst working from home".



/BT/

'At BT, we believe that there are real opportunities to use ICT products and services to promote sustainability, not only in the way we run our own businesses, but by helping our customers to benefit too.

We welcome the findings of the **actnow** Sustainable Broadband report. Details of how BT is responding to these challenges and opportunities can be found in our online Social and Environmental Report at www.bt.com/betterworld -

Dr Lizzie Beesley, Regional Director, BT plc

See the full Sustainable Broadband report at www.actnowcornwall.co.uk

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