

AT&T launches gigabit Internet service in San Jose, San Francisco

Posted: 05/16/2016 09:01:00 PM PDT | Updated: 4 days ago

Residents of San Francisco, San Jose and four other Bay Area cities can now take their broadband service into the Giga Age.

AT&T announced late Monday it has expanded the reach of its GigaPower service. As of Tuesday morning, people who live in parts of Santa Clara, San Ramon, Mountain View and Dublin -- as well as the Bay Area's two biggest cities -- will be able to sign up for the Internet service, which offers download speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second.

Streaming video services like Netflix "are making this a more in-demand product," said Marc Blakeman, AT&T's vice president for external affairs. "We're finding a lot more interest."

SPEED IS MONEY: BROADBAND COMPARISON

	AT&T GigaPower	AT&T U-Verse	Comcast
Download speed	1 Gbps*	75 Mbps	2 Gbps
Upload speed	1 Gbps	8 Mbps	2 Gbps
Monthly price	\$70	\$75	\$300
Price for triple-play package of broadband, pay TV and landline phone	\$129	\$110	N/A
Time to download a 4GB high-definition movie	32 seconds	About 7 minutes	16 seconds
Upload a 1GB movie	8 seconds	About 17 minutes	4 seconds

*1 gigabit=1,024 megabits

Notes: Speeds and price are for the fastest broadband service available in the area. AT&T's GigaPower prices are for customers who agree to have their Web surfing habits tracked by the company. AT&T charges \$29 a month extra to those who opt out.

Source: The companies

BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

With the launch, AT&T is the first major Bay Area broadband provider to widely offer gigabit service targeted at consumers. Comcast offers gigabit service to some of its local customers, but requires them to have special equipment to get it. Google has announced plans to bring Google Fiber, its gigabit service, to San Francisco and is considering bringing it to San Jose, but doesn't offer service in either location yet.

The threat of Google Fiber has spurred AT&T, Comcast and other traditional broadband providers to upgrade their networks and offer gigabit service sooner than they might otherwise have done, said Bill Menezes, an analyst who covers communications services for Gartner, a tech research firm. They're also trying to get ahead of consumer demand, he said.

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The move to gigabit broadband represents a marked increase in the upload and download speeds previously available to Bay Area residents, particular to AT&T customers. The fastest service AT&T offers through U-Verse, its older broadband service, is 75 megabits per second. But that's only the download speed -- uploads are limited to a pedestrian 8 megabits per second -- and even that service is only available to a select number of customers in certain parts of the area.

Most consumers don't yet need gigabit service, Menezes said. But that will likely change over time with new applications and additional devices added to the network.

"You don't need a gig if you've got a couple and kids streaming Netflix," he said. But you may in the future "if you continue to add other things."

Like Google Fiber, AT&T's GigaPower service relies on fiber optic lines that carry signals all the way to residents' homes. In order to provide gigabit service, AT&T has to first string the fiber lines on utility poles or dig up city streets and lay them underground.

AT&T began offering its gigabit service in the Bay Area last year, when it launched GigaPower in Cupertino. It announced in December that it would be expanding to additional cities in the Bay Area.

Among the cities AT&T said then it would expand to this year is Oakland. That city didn't make the cut for Tuesday's launch, but GigaPower service there will "definitely be coming later this year," said Leland Kim, an AT&T spokesman.

AT&T officials declined to say which neighborhoods in San Francisco, San Jose and the other GigaPower cities will now have access to the service, citing "competitive" reasons. They also declined to say exactly how many households in particular cities now can sign up for the service.

The company is offering GigaPower at tens of thousands of locations in the Bay Area, Kim said. AT&T plans to triple that amount by the end of the year, he said.

Company officials advised residents in cities where it is offering GigaPower to check with the AT&T website to see if the service is available at their houses.

As part of the expansion, AT&T is cutting the price of GigaPower from what it initially charged for the service in Cupertino. Residents can now sign up for stand-alone gigabit Internet service for \$70 a month on a one-year contract. AT&T is offering a "triple play" package of broadband, landline phone service and pay TV for \$129 a month.

Previously in Cupertino, AT&T charged \$110 a month for stand-alone GigaPower Internet access and \$180 a month for the triple play. All those prices assume that customers agree to allow AT&T to track their Web surfing habits for the purpose of delivering targeted ads. The company charges \$29 a month more at each level of service for customers who opt out of the tracking.

Contact Troy Wolverton at 408-840-4285. Follow him at [Twitter.com/troywolv](https://twitter.com/troywolv).

GIGAPOWERING UP THE BAY AREA

AT&T is launching its superfast GigaPower broadband service in six new Bay Area cities on Tuesday.

What is it? GigaPower is a broadband service that offers upload and download speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second.

Where is it available? AT&T began offering GigaPower in Cupertino last year. With Tuesday's launch, residents of parts of San Francisco, San Jose, Mountain View, Santa Clara, San Ramon and Dublin can now sign up for the service.

What does it cost? AT&T charges \$70 a month for stand-alone 1-gigabit broadband service. It charges \$129 monthly for a "triple play" that also includes landline phone and pay TV service. Customers who don't want their Web surfing habits tracked by AT&T have to pay an additional \$29 a month.

Is it available in my neighborhood? AT&T won't say which specific neighborhoods in particular cities can get GigaPower. It suggest residents visit its website to see if they can sign up.

If it's not available at my house yet, when will I be able to get it? AT&T plans to launch GigaPower in Oakland and triple the number of locations in the Bay Area that can get the service by the end of the year. But other than Oakland, it won't say what other Bay Area cities will get the service or when or if it will roll it out in particular neighborhoods in cities that already have access to it.

Do I have to sign up for 1-gigabit service? No. AT&T is also offering GigaPower plans with speeds of 100 megabits per second and 300 megabits per second.

What kind of data caps does AT&T have on GigaPower service? Right now, they're set at 500 gigabytes per month. But on May 23, AT&T plans to raise that to 1 terabyte on all GigaPower plans. Customers can get unlimited data for \$30 extra per month or by signing up for a service package that includes both broadband and pay television.

Source: AT&T