

5G Connectivity Access: What your business needs to know



“5G is an exciting technology,” says Independence Research Telecom Analyst Matt Davis. **“The big question in the industry is whether it has the speed and reliability** needed to offer businesses the broadband performance they need.”

There has been significant discussion, hype and confusion regarding the arrival of 5G among media outlets and businesses over the past few years.

The considerable bandwidth increases and faster upload and download speeds promised by 5G make it an exciting development. However, there are still many questions about how small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) should prepare for this technology and what exact benefits it will deliver upon arrival.

Small business owners or managers are often responsible for making important decisions about the technology they invest in and the methods of connectivity they rely on. With respect to broadband connectivity and performance, many SMBs are asking themselves what their businesses stand to gain from 5G. As they explore potential advantages, SMB owners should take a hard look at whether 5G is truly a robust enough technology to support the demands of their businesses. It makes sense to compare 5G performance to other services based on more mature technologies that may be better suited to meet their Internet connectivity requirements. In the following overview, we'll help you learn more about 5G connectivity, its potential as a replacement for broadband and whether it's the right technology for your business today.

Can a 5G connection power your business?

What is 5G?

5G is the 5th generation mobile network. It's considered a new global wireless standard and is the planned successor to the 4G network that has been used by cell phone companies throughout the U.S. since 2010. 5G is designed primarily for use on the mobile network (allowing users to download and view content on more devices at once); however, it's sometimes positioned as a possible future replacement for broadband.

5G has the potential to match the speed of Fiber broadband connections, with download speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second. Unlike broadband, 5G is powered by “small cells,” or small densely concentrated antennas that connect via Fiber to a tower, so its speeds and availability are reliant on signal strength and the amount of cell sites nearby.

5G limitations

As early as 2019, major mobile carriers began marketing “Nationwide 5G” availability, which caused a widespread spike in interest in the technology and offering. However, when looking at coverage maps today, 5G availability is still very limited to major metropolitan areas. In fact, according to mobile industry analytics company Opensignal, the highest percentage of users connecting to 5G nationwide is less than 23%, with average speeds clocking in at 34 Mbps. The limited availability of 5G is mostly due to the type of technology being used. The most common base stations are designed to be installed on light posts and signposts, meaning that 5G deployment is most practical in areas of high population density. This means that many SMBs located outside of major cities don’t have access to a 5G connection yet, and may have to wait several years before it becomes available to them. Additionally, 5G signals bounce off metal and glass, meaning that there may still be areas within buildings that don’t have access, even when it’s available in the region.

Broadband is still the standard

Fortunately, 5G isn’t the only option for SMBs looking for a connectivity solution to power their businesses. Broadband connectivity offers widespread availability and reliability that can’t currently be matched by 5G. It also delivers the high speeds and advanced features expected by enterprise-level businesses.

Within the workplace, broadband connections don’t share the same limitations as 5G. Because broadband isn’t based on wireless signals, the connection can’t be

blocked by thick walls or glass, and its accompanying router can be placed anywhere on premises.

Broadband can also support as many users as needed, which is beneficial for businesses that have customers visiting or employees using multiple devices. Another key benefit of broadband is that it’s currently the most cost-efficient option for speed and reliability, which is important to many SMB owners with limited budgets for technology services.

What’s undeniably true right now is that from simple email exchanges to advanced digital storefront applications, SMBs are increasingly dependent on secure, reliable Internet. In a recent Independence Research SMB Internet study, almost 80% of businesses surveyed said their productivity would be reduced by more than 50% if their Internet service was interrupted – less than 4% said it wouldn’t have an impact at all. Giving consideration to availability, reliability, connectivity and cost factors, for most businesses today, broadband is still the best option.

Most small business leaders don’t have a strong preference on which technology they use for Internet access as long as it performs well and is reliable. However, for those business decision-makers who do have a preference, Fiber or some other form of wireline is preferred over mobile by a factor of 3 to 1, according to Independence Research. Overall, it’s clear that 5G will not be a replacement for broadband; instead, it will be used in the future to complement it.

Curious to learn more about the connectivity offerings in your area, and which are best for your business?

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