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### Which satellite Internet system is best for you?

By Malia Lane

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The only thing I didn't want to forfeit when I started fulltiming was high-speed Internet access. I lusted after the automatic roof-mounted dish with the cool blue lights, but a look at my budget quickly quenched that fire.

Then I heard about people moving Direcway dishes around using tripods. As with most things less expensive, it involved more manual labor, but the numbers were impressive enough to convince me it was worth the extra hassle.

While some techno whizzes have managed to set up their own systems, usually an authorized installer is required. The choice of installer is also important evidenced by complaints on the forums about those who suddenly become unavailable when you have a problem. Installers are listed on the companies' websites, some being fulltime RVers who do this from the road.

Following is info on providers and plans

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offered.

**Motosat/Datastorm** -- Offers only the automatic roof mounted dish with pricing in the \$5,000-plus range for the .74 meter size. A 1.2 meter dish is available at a much bigger price (\$12,000). Basic monthly ISP is \$99.99.

**Hughes/Direcway** -- Installers offer tripod systems for a .74 and .98 meter dish, with the larger dish providing wider coverage. While there are varying configurations, the commercial surveyor tripod that folds compactly for travel is the best bet for the traveler. Pricing is in the \$1,400 range including setup and all the doo-dads necessary to find and tweak the signal.

ISP plans range from \$60-\$130 monthly depending on term commitment, bandwidth limits and refresh rate. The last two terms relate to "FAP" (Fair Access Policy), intended to prevent some users from hogging all the bandwidth. If you just surf, Email and EBay, no worries. If you download streaming video or a lot of MP3 files, you might get "fapped," which will slow your service for a while.

The fine print about the tripod is that mobility is not officially sanctioned by Direcway. However, no one seems to think they will suspend this service, as they've known for years now whenever a system is moved. Because you can't call them with pointing problems, this is when a responsive installer comes in handy. There are also excellent online user groups that offer support with any problems that arise.

**Starband** -- offers both automatic and tripod system. They sanction moving, but users must be trained by a certified installer first. Their automatic system is in the \$6,000 range and the tripod setup around \$1,700, with ISP plans from \$55 - \$135 depending on service speed and term commitment. They have hefty early termination fees up to \$600, so be careful.

#### FAQs:

##### What system is best?

The debate over Starband vs. Direcway and auto point vs. tripod could keep you arguing around the campfire all night. Auto people swear that the extra expense is worth it for the convenience of being able to set up quicker and not having to get outside to do it during bad weather. Tripod folks like the flexibility of being able to position around trees and swear the moving process becomes second nature quickly enough.

One difference to consider between Direcway and StarBand's lowest cost plans is that the Direcway DW6000 is "self-hosted," one advantage being that you can hook up a wireless router with no software installation on your PC. StarBand must be cabled to a Windows PC that runs StarBand software. This also matters if you don't want to drill holes into the RV for running cable inside. With a router placed in an outside bin, you get you get your signal inside, as well as having the option to let others "piggy-back" like a wi-fi hotspot.

##### How fast can I go?

While speeds quoted range from 500 kbps to 1mg downloads for differing plans, the caveat from the providers says it depends on "traffic at the time of the Internet use." Upload speeds are always

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much slower than download. I know when I'm uploading pages to my website, I lose the signal frequently and it's no faster than dialup, but I'm still happy being able to do it from my own home.

#### **Can I use the TV satellite dish I have?**

Sorry. While the internet dish can be used for TV with an optional attachment, the reverse is not true.

#### **How hard is it to get it going?**

Can you use a GPS to determine your position? Do you know how to read a compass or use a bubble level? Then you've got a good head start and there are tools, software and gadgets galore to help with every step.

#### **How much time does it take to learn?**

At first it seemed like it would take forever just to learn the terminology, much less the setup. Usually an installer will spend a couple of hours showing you the necessary steps. And it's like anything else in life -- you get better at it the more you do it. Twenty minutes is average once you're familiar with the tripod process, less than half that for the automatic pointer.

There are helpful forums at DataStormUsers.com and RVNetworking.com, with lots of info and experienced people willing to help out the newbies.

Now you can surf to your heart's content in almost any backyard you come across in your travels. Happy cybertrails!

[\*Read about Malia Lane's life on the road at her website.\*](#)

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