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## AT&T Mulls Surcharge for High DSL Use

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AT&T is considering a surcharge for customers who go above the normal amount of downloaded data on the Internet.

AT&T spokesman Michael Coe says that given the trends the company is seeing, a form of usage-based pricing for those customers who have abnormally high usage patterns is "inevitable."

"Usage-based pricing is one way to deal fairly with Internet usage, which is very uneven among broadband users," he says.

The company's analysis of broadband users shows that a small percentage of customers use a large percentage of total bandwidth. The top 5% of consumer DSL subscribers use 46% of the total bandwidth, while the top 1% of subscribers are using 21% of bandwidth.

"Broadband use is surging," Coe says. "Based on current trends, total bandwidth in the AT&T network will increase by four times over the next three years."

Coe added that AT&T is currently evaluating broadband plans and services, but has nothing new to announce regarding pricing structure. Shares of AT&T were lately down 28 cents, or 0.8%, to \$36.11.

While a usage surcharge is not expected to affect users who simply browse Web pages or check email, Internet subscribers who download high-definition movies from **Apple's** AAPL iTunes store or **Netflix's** NFLX download service could be subject to extra fees if they go over their quota.

Metered billing is not something new to telecom companies. **Time Warner Cable** TWC earlier this month said Internet users in Beaumont, Texas, will have monthly caps for the amount of data they will be allowed to upload and download.

Subscribers who go over these caps will be charged \$1 per gigabyte. **Comcast** CMCSA, the nation's largest cable provider, has reportedly mulled a similar allowance for Internet usage.

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