

[actnow](#)  
**a public- private initiative to promote  
broadband communications in Cornwall**



***Background***

Cornwall is one of the most remote of the English counties, lying at the south western tip of the country. It nevertheless has a history of innovation, starting with Trevithick at the beginning of the industrial age, when mining technologies pioneered in the county revolutionised the industry throughout the world. The first transatlantic telegraph cables landed in Cornwall and Marconi's first radio transmission across the Atlantic was also made from the county. Another pioneering moment was the construction of Britain's first satellite earth-station at Goonhilly Downs in the 1960s.

However, with the decline of heavy industry, Cornwall's GDP-per-head has fallen below the EU average. This entitles it to "Objective One" status and support from the EU's structural funds.

actnow (Access for Cornwall through Telecommunications to New Opportunities Worldwide) is an example of how this "Objective One" funding is being used to leverage private investment and help Cornwall move into a post-industrial age where new technology can again play an important role in regenerating the county's economy.

Its goal is to make Cornwall the place to do business in the 21st century and its aims include:

- bringing broadband and its benefits to businesses throughout Cornwall
- improving the competitiveness of existing Cornish businesses on a national and world wide stage.
- stimulating the growth of new SME's within the county.
- increasing the opportunities for external companies to do business in the county's unique surroundings.
- improving local SME' understanding of of he benefits of ICT.

***The structure of the initiative***

actnow was formed to bring affordable ADSL broadband to Cornwall and support economic growth by raising the awareness of small businesses about what Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) could do for them. The initiative is a public-private partnership involving Cornwall Enterprise, BT, The South West Regional Development Agency (SWERDA), Business Link and Cornwall College. Cornwall Enterprise, a wholly owned subsidiary of Cornwall County Council, is the lead partner.

The £12.5/\_20 million project, which started in April 2002 and will run until March 2005, includes about £5.25/\_8.4 million from the European Regional Development Fund. BT, whose investment in the project will exceed £3/\_4.8 million, sees actnow as a model for the kind of partnerships needed to extend broadband coverage to the more rural parts of the UK. Pierre Danon, Chief Executive of BT Retail, said "Cornwall could be the blueprint for the

development of broadband in other regions of the UK where, without this kind of partnership approach, deployment is currently uneconomic." Nigel Ashcroft, the actnow project director, said that pre-launch publicity had resulted in more than 150 inquiries. "Many of the calls were from local companies wanting to know more about the project and the technology, but we also received inquiries from individuals and organisations elsewhere in the UK interested in relocating to Cornwall."

BT's contribution to the project will include upgrading 13 Cornish telephone exchanges to deliver ADSL broadband services. It will do so at significantly lower levels of demand than those normally required to justify deployment of the technology. Further exchanges may be upgraded in addition to the current scope of the project, especially if BT trials of a low-cost 16-port ADSL unit suitable for smaller exchanges are successful. BT is also responsible for putting together a set of hardware and software packages to help businesses with varying levels of IT awareness to make the best of the opportunities created by broadband.

Business Link's business advisors will help individual SMEs to understand how ICT could help them to make their businesses more efficient or address new kinds of commercial opportunities. Cornwall College will provide an extensive programme of training courses, from basic computer literacy through to website design, programming languages and Microsoft or Cisco engineer accreditation. A related initiative '[Let' do I.T!](#)' offers businesses free advice on their training needs and provides some of the more basic courses free of charge.

### ***What actnow offers to small businesses***

At the beginning of the project (April 2002) BT upgraded six of its Cornish telephone exchanges (Camborne, Newquay, Penzance, Redruth, St Austell, and Truro) to deliver ADSL broadband services. In September 2002 it upgraded a further three exchanges (Bodmin, Falmouth and Launceston) and it plans to upgrade the Bude, Penryn, St Ives and Saltash exchanges early in 2003.

This roll-out will mean that 93,000 households and 12,000 businesses - 68% of all potential business customers - will be within ADSL enabled exchange areas in Cornwall. The basic ADSL broadband business package provides customers with:

- an always-on Internet connection at downstream rates of 500 kbit/s (optional connection up to 2MPS are available dependant on line survey)
- a domain name for the business plus 10 e-mail addresses
- 20 MByte of web space
- privileged members' access to the actsnow website

actnow also offers small and medium sized businesses (up to 250 people) free installation of the ADSL broadband link (worth £210/\_400) and a £10/\_16 discount on the normal monthly charge of £29.99/\_47.99 for the first 24 months of the basic package. Other similarly discounted packages offer downstream bitrates of up to 2 Mbit/s

Small businesses can also buy a subsidised range of hardware and software packages designed to support broadband, always-on communications subject to approval. The packages include high-specification computers, software (industry standard business applications, such as Word Excel, and Outlook, plus firewall and virus protection software), and peripherals such as printers and webcams, along with familiarisation training, three years on-site service support and a single point of contact phone number. The packages have been developed by BT with the help of other world-class suppliers, such as CISCO, Dell, HP and Microsoft.

Irrespective of whether they eventually choose to buy broadband services or one of the hardware/software packages, small businesses can have a free consultation with one of actnow's business advisors.

### ***The achievements to date***

The publicity generated by actnow has been highly effective in encouraging small businesses and residential customers to register their interest in broadband services. The demand has been so great that BT has already upgraded nine of the 13 telephone exchanges that it originally planned to upgrade during the three years of the project and, subject to satisfactory sign-up levels in existing exchange areas, will upgrade the remaining four exchanges early in 2003.

Over 2000 Cornish businesses and residential users have already signed up for broadband services and over 400 have taken advantage of the subsidised packages offered by the initiative.

Some success stories are already emerging. A few examples<sup>1</sup> are:

- Creative Edge is an award-winning design consultancy in Truro which provides a comprehensive service in the production of websites, logos, corporate identities, brochures, stationery, packaging, exhibition design and advertising to a wide range of companies. They spend a lot of time on-line and found ADSL a much more effective way of transferring large volumes of data to and from their clients.
- Stephens and Scown, a long established practice of solicitors with offices in Cornwall and Devon, found that broadband technology allowed them to improve the service they could offer to their clients, who come from many parts of the UK and as far afield as Canada and Australia.
- Barbara Ellenbroek found that ASDL allowed her to develop the e-commerce dimension of her Redruth arts and craft supplies shop, whilst still using the phone line and fax machine for dealing with less technically aware customers.
- Stephen and Yvonne Hill run the award-winning Mount Prospect hotel in Penzance. Their hotel was the first actnow broadband customer when BT upgraded the Penzance exchange in April. They believe that it is important to market their hotel's services globally and see ADSL as a

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<sup>1</sup> More details of these and other success stories can be found on the actnow website at [http://www.actnowcornwall.co.uk/case\\_studies.htm](http://www.actnowcornwall.co.uk/case_studies.htm)

way of handling Internet based interactions with customers and suppliers more efficiently, whilst still having a phone/fax line for dealing with customers who prefer more traditional approaches to communications.

- Quintdown Press is a printing company with outlets in Truro and Camborne and Newquay, where Quintdown also runs an Internet Café. Since installing broadband in May 2002, owner John Jay has been delighted by the effect broadband has had on the business. Revenue in the Internet café increased by 50% within weeks of installing broadband. Meanwhile, the print business has become more productive as a result of the faster transfer of files from one unit to another. The business spends a lot less money on couriers and can deliver work to customers more quickly.

### **Conclusions**

actnow is a demand-led initiative to encourage 3,300 businesses in Cornwall to move into the new broadband economy. It is expected to create more than 1,000 jobs from the commercial applications of broadband services in Cornwall.

actnow has been identified by the IST project [BEEP](http://www.beep-eu.org) ([www.beep-eu.org](http://www.beep-eu.org)), which is responsible for establishing benchmarks for the introduction of e-business in Europe, as an example of best practice in using public-private partnerships to deliver the commercial benefits of broadband services to small businesses in remote areas.

There is no doubt that actnow offers a useful funding model, bringing together contributions from the EU social fund, local authorities and private companies that want to expand their business in the area. It also brings together the skills of the various partners, from detailed knowledge of local needs to the ability to procure world-class solutions at global prices and deliver the training needed to exploit those solutions effectively.