

Single Play, Double Play, and Triple Play

This is one of a series of articles provided by the Oakmont Technology Learning Center on the use of technology by seniors.

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No, we're not talking about baseball; we're talking about telephone, internet, and TV "bundled" services from telecommunications providers and their package deals.

Single play is internet-only. Double play is two out of the three services, and triple play is internet, TV, and telephone. The vendors who provide wireline telecommunications services in Oakmont are Comcast, AT&T, and Sonic. It could also be argued that there is quadruple play since cellular phone service is also offered by Comcast.

Bundling can often save money on a monthly basis when purchased from the same vendor, but it's a buyer-beware situation: the vendors' cheapest bundled packages may have internet speeds too slow for your streaming or video conference needs (think Netflix or Zoom). You may want basic TV and/or phone service but you may need a higher level of internet service.

A future article will deal with wireless internet and satellite internet options. This article deals with wireline telecommunications: wired services to our homes from Comcast, AT&T, and Sonic (Sonic uses AT&T infrastructure).

Internet "speed" is measured in millions of data bits per second (Mbps). In order to handle streaming and video conferencing, plus all of your other internet-connected devices (smart phones, tablet computers, TVs, Roku, Sling, Apple TV, and smart home devices), we recommend a minimum download speed of 25 Mbps. Some providers' basic bundles provide a much lower speed and you may want to spend the money for a higher rate.

Want to know what speed you're getting now? Go the website 'speedtest.net' and run a test; it will show your actual download and upload speeds (you're mostly concerned with the download number for streaming, but video conferencing on Zoom uses upload). If download is less than 25 Mbps you may want to consider upgrading.

To provide their highest speed internet, providers rely on fiber optic cables. For Oakmont, however, that requires a provider to install a fiber infrastructure to support it. Sonic has not installed fiber in Oakmont and has no plans to; speeds are limited to about 25 Mbps or less. AT&T does use fiber in some, but not all neighborhoods, in Oakmont. If you are in one of the unsupported neighborhoods, your internet speed will be similar to Sonic. Comcast also employs fiber optic cable and in general has the largest Oakmont footprint and fastest speed options, including billions of data bits per second (Gbps).

Lastly, provider bundles often lock you into a contract for 12-24 months, after which their rates will revert to their normal pricing (think BIG price increases). When evaluating bundles it's important to consider what the cost will be after the contract period is over. Yes, there is money to be saved by bundling, but there are more considerations than price. Do your homework and be an informed shopper.

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