

## BOOSTY

COMPUTER SHOPPER



BEST BUY

£69 one-off payment with £39

subscription for second and subsequent years

• From [www.boosty.com](http://www.boosty.com)

## VERDICT

A brilliantly simple idea that not only boosts broadband speeds but also provides a handy backup should your connection drop

**THE INCONSISTENT SPEED** of broadband in the UK remains a bugbear for a large part of the population. You can live somewhere with superfast fibre, and two streets away a neighbour is tearing their hair out, barely getting 2Mbit/s.

Boosty is a first foray into levelling that playing field, using the power that's already in your hands doing nothing: your mobile phone. If you also have a lousy mobile signal, you might want to look away now, but if you've got 4G that laughs at your home internet speeds, this might be for you.

We first looked at Boosty at the Gadget Show Live (*Shopper 341*) and were struck by its simplicity and elegance – a rare thing in networking. It uses a process called line bonding, common for businesses but almost unheard of in residential circles. The premise is simple: two lines, run together via a central server that meshes the signal. It's similar to the way some download manager programs work. Instead of two ADSL lines, though, it's your broadband line and your mobile signal.

## BOX OF TRICKS

Boosty itself consists of a small box, about the size of a matchbox, which plugs into a spare Ethernet port on your PC, drawing power from a USB port. You may even have a spare one of those on your router already.

On the mobile side, an app for iOS or Android runs in the background of your device and listens for Boosty's cries for help. When Boosty detects that your home broadband is a little lacking, for example during gaming or streaming a movie, it sends a call out to the phone to bolster the connection. If the Boosty app is on multiple devices, it will search for the best signal.

Setup is as near to idiot-proof as possible. Install the app, plug Boosty in and follow the instructions. At the computer end, by logging into Boosty's web page you can get control over exactly what Boosty can and can't do.



Alarm bells will doubtless already be ringing as you envisage running up a huge mobile bill. Fortunately, the controls to prevent this are comprehensive. You can control how much bandwidth Boosty is allowed to use, and more importantly set a data limit with a refresh date so you're never caught short. The other important thing to remember is that Boosty will only resort to your mobile connection if it's necessary. If it can manage without, Boosty will do nothing.

Another option is to directly connect Boosty to a 4G dongle so you don't have to worry about having your phone nearby.

If all this sounds too good to be true, there are caveats. First, although we found on a 1.92Mbit/s connection with three bars of 4G,

works out at less than the price of a pint a month, and that's a pretty small price to pay for making the impossible suddenly possible.

## FALLBACK POSITION

Even if you have fast broadband, Boosty has another potential use. If you work from home, it provides a brilliantly simple means of fallback if your internet drops out or goes down, and when time is money, that's definitely worth the subscription.

There's very little to compare Boosty to. It's one of those rare moments in *Shopper* where we actually get to review something

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we were able to get 11.86Mbit/s – not quite enough to stream a 4K movie, but fine for a more standard live stream without stuttering – that's the top speed we could reach. If your home broadband is already above 12Mbit/s, this isn't the product for you. Boosty can't suddenly give you fibre optic speeds, it's not designed for that, but we were pleased that despite sending the data via its servers first, the result was impressive.

Second, although all data is anonymised, it does have to pass through the company's servers, and you may be a bit uncomfortable with that. Boosty's makers are adamant that there's no risk of hacking; as well as being anonymous, traffic is bank-level encrypted.

We balked a little at the £69 subscription fee being charged for use of the service, with £39 being charged for each subsequent year. However, do the maths and you'll see that it

completely unique; but don't think that means it's being given a Best Buy award by default.

Boosty is a well-thought-out, well-engineered and incredibly simple idea. It does what it needs to do and does it incredibly well. Handoffs between regular traffic and boosted traffic are seamless and our concerns that the app could prove a battery hog have proved, at least so far, unfounded.

It's not a product for everyone. But as the government is considering changes in rural broadband policy that could see communities with speeds of 10Mbit/s and slower only getting upgraded on demand, Boosty could be a valuable alternative.

In those situations, as long as your mobile signal is good, then this could prove to be a more cost-effective instant solution. For everyone else, it still represents a business tool that prevents dropouts, for when being offline is simply not an option. For all those reasons, the Boosty box is a Best Buy.

Chris Merriman



## SPECIFICATIONS

**OS SUPPORT** Android/iOS • **REQUIREMENTS** 4G signal to be effective; spare Ethernet 10/100/1000 port and USB power (not supplied) • **DETAILS** [www.boosty.com](http://www.boosty.com)