



Bob Elliott is the Commercial Director at UK Telecom. He's an expert in telephone networks and broadband and knows how to get the best from any service

GETTING YOUR NETWORK ON TRACK

Bob Elliott reveals how the speed of your broadband can be just as important as comfortable beds and beautiful views when it comes to securing repeat bookings at your gîte



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q How can you maximise bookings in France's very competitive gîte and holiday home market?

A Each year the advice regarding broadband seems to change. Once access became more widely available, there was a huge interest in gîte owners wanting/needing a good website to promote the uniqueness of their property. Since then, things have moved on, with access to reliable broadband in holiday properties now an essential requirement for many.

Sending postcards that arrive after your holiday is over cannot compete with Facetime, Skype and instant messaging. Now guests expect to be able to use their favourite devices like iPads and Kindles, while sending photos from mobiles using the gîte's wi-fi, so not using up all of their data allowance.

The large investment being made in the French telecoms network is bringing better broadband to more holiday properties and is reflected in the way they are marketed. However, with Saturday being the usual changeover day, any problems visitors experience connecting to the broadband service can be complicated by the fact that most telecoms offices are closed at the weekend, with engineers only working Monday to Friday. Add to this situations where property owners are not on hand to assist with getting connected, and the result can be a poor start to your guests' holiday.

Recommendations and repeat bookings can suffer as a result of network difficulties.

Q What can you do to get guests' holidays off to the best start?

A As soon as your guests have unpacked, you can be sure they will want to let everybody know they have arrived safely, and post

photos of themselves in their holiday home online! Any problems getting connected will create a poor first impression.

To guard against this, prepare a separate page for your information pack giving more details than just the wi-fi code. Make sure you include the name of the network provider as well. Remind guests that wi-fi codes are case sensitive and often simply mistaking a numeral '0' for a letter 'o' can prevent connection. If guests still have problems, which is unusual but should be noted if experienced, they will want help, which might be difficult if you don't live nearby or have little technical know-how.

A few telecoms firms offer a bilingual French/English customer service that might suit your situation. It's also worth considering a company that will suspend your service when the property is not occupied to save you money.

Q What if internet issues cannot be resolved remotely and you are not in the country?

A In this case, you will need to provide the contact details for your broadband supplier plus the phone number and your account number so your guests can access help. It's possible that an issue may arise that is not resolvable remotely, so you will need to provide contact details for yourself or someone nearby who can meet an engineer and go to your property to investigate. Your guests will not want to wait in for help to come while they should be enjoying their holiday.

A simple addition to your 'changeover tick list' to check that the wi-fi connection is working, plus the previously mentioned 'help sheet' – including the broadband service name and wi-fi code, together with the help number – should mitigate many issues.

While things can go wrong, most problems can be fixed relatively painlessly and quickly. ■

● **Keep up to date** with the latest developments in France, find out how to increase your broadband speed and save money on uktelecom.net

● **For more information** call +44 (0)1483 477100 or 0805 631632 (free from France), or email enquiries@uktelecom.net