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Connecting to Wireless Hotspots

If you have a wireless home network, you've probably discovered the joys of connecting to the Internet from just about anywhere around the house. Out in the garden, propped up in bed, in front of the TV - your laptop goes wherever you go.

The next step, already big with business travelers and students, involves moving beyond the borders of home to a "hotspot."

Read on for a few tips to help you connect on the go.

"Hotspot" is the term best associated with public spaces equipped with wireless Internet access; in other words, a place where you can connect to the Internet with your own Wi-Fi, or wireless-equipped device, such as a notebook computer, without cables. Current locations worldwide include hotels, convention centers, airports, golf clubs, libraries, coffee shops, restaurants and even trains.

More than 200,000 Wi-Fi hotspots exist worldwide according to leading wireless hotspot locator sites like Jiwire. Five years ago, that number was closer to 20,000. Experts predict Wi-Fi hotspot deployments to continue at a rapid pace. There will likely be more than 400,000 hotspots around the world in the year 2010.

Finding Wireless Hotspots

So, now that you know how many hotspots are out there, how do you find them and get online? The sites listed below feature both for fee and free wireless hotspots all around the world. These are just a few of the many "hotspot finder" listings you can find online.

jiwire.com

hotspothaven.com

wifinder.com

openwifispots.com

hotspotr.com

How to Connect on the Go

Is it easy to connect to a hotspot? Extremely. In a nutshell: if you can surf wirelessly at home, you can surf wirelessly anywhere.

Newer laptops already come equipped with wireless technology. Older laptops require a wireless access card, available at any computer store, which gets plugged into a slot on the side of the laptop.

What Next?

Arrive at a hotspot, power up your laptop and check to see whether you're getting a network signal. The signal indicator may be a green light on the wireless card or an icon on the bottom of the screen.

Most operating systems will configure your wireless networking card automatically and a login screen will pop up to announce you have wireless access. Access could be free, but either way you will be required to input user information such as an e-mail address, password and method of payment - check with an employee to find out if you have to get a special password, or pay in advance. You are ready to start surfing.

Set up Your Security Options

In terms of security, it's important to remember **PUBLIC HOTSPOTS, BY THEIR PURE NATURE, ARE OPEN**. Please make sure you take precautions, and have firewalls and antivirus protections in place to stop other folks from getting in and seeing your files, or accessing your private information.

In addition to firewalls and antivirus software, notebook users frequenting hotspots should make sure they:

Disable file sharing: Control Panel > Network and Sharing Center > click File sharing, Public folder sharing, Printer sharing and Media sharing to off.

Encrypt any folders containing sensitive personal or financial information (locate folder > right-click for Properties > under the General tab click Advanced > enable Encrypt contents to secure data).

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