



## How to find those Wireless Hotspots!

If you own a laptop with wireless connectivity, it's going to happen sooner or later. You are traveling somewhere with your laptop and need to access the Internet. What do you do? You could start knocking on doors and asking people if they have a wireless connection you can "borrow." But after having a few doors slammed in your face, you might think there has to be an easier way. There is, find a public hotspot!

Let's first define what a public hotspot is. You will hear the terms Wi-Fi, Wireless and Hotspot tossed around with will abandon. They all refer to the ability to connect to the Internet without being physically connected to a network with a cable, hence the term Wireless. Wi-Fi, means Wireless Fidelity (remember Hi-Fi?). A Hotspot is a physical location where you can access a wireless router with your Wi-Fi enabled laptop and connect to the Internet. Sometimes such a connection is free, other times you have to buy "time" on that service provider's network.

And that brings up to our "public service announcement".

If you are accessing a public hotspot, the data being transmitted to and from the Internet is NOT secure. DO NOT transmit bank accounts numbers, credit card numbers, or highly important passwords over this wireless connection. It's a good idea to change any passwords you need to use while traveling to a temporary password before you leave home and change it again when you get home, just to protect yourself.

In addition, your laptop is also vulnerable to viruses and spyware while on a wireless network. Make sure you have a firewall installed and your anti-virus software is up-to-date and running. In addition, check for spyware often.

We now return you back to our regularly scheduled program.

Now that you know what a Hotspot is, how do you find one in your present location? There are a number of ways.

Before leaving home, find a Hotspot at your destination while you still have a working Internet connection. There are a number of number of web pages that give the locations of free and for-fee hotspots in the area you are traveling to.

First check out Wigle.net, the *Wireless Geographical Engine* with the locations of 3.5 million hotspots worldwide. Go to <http://www.wigle.net/gps/gps/Map/onlinemap/> and you are presented with a map of the world. Click on the area you will be visiting or enter the address. Zoom in on your location and any little red box that appears on the map is a

known Hotspot. Plant yourself in the vicinity of that location, and you should be able to access the Internet.

Another web site that provides Hotspots is Intel's Hotspot Finder. It can be accessed at <http://intel.jiwire.com/>. You can enter an address, or search a text list of locations. From this site I was easily able to find two hotspots in Green Valley.

But let's suppose you didn't plan ahead. You are in a strange city and have no idea where any hotspots are. Now what does one do?

More and more public areas are starting to include Hotspots in their list of offerings. Many public libraries, colleges, airports, coffee shops (think Starbucks), and even hotel lobbies have wireless Internet access. Sometimes you will have to get a password to use the Hotspot, but most times, you are just a click away.

A final way to find a Hotspot in a strange location is by using hardware. You can wander around clicking on the **Refresh** function in your *Wireless Network Connection Status* window hoping to stumble across a Hotspot. But this can become tedious and is definitely not recommended while trying to drive. Alternatively, you can invest in a Wi-Fi locator. This is a piece of hardware independent of your laptop that will locate hotspots for you. They are made by such companies as Kensington, Targus and other companies that deal in laptop accessories.

So, grab your wireless laptop and hit the road, assured that you will be able to read e-mail from the kids and check your stock portfolio wherever you are.

Written for:

The Green Bytes

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