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Looking to be productive anywhere? - Free WiFi can help!

It wasn't so long ago that people thought of high speed Internet service as a luxury item. DSL was magic, shared on small business networks with a collection of cables, switches and routers. Unfortunately this technology left people thirsty for more. Soon after came Cable and Fiber offerings (at various speeds) helping to transform Internet service from a luxury item to a basic utility; a MUST HAVE. Around the same time, wireless technology eliminated the need for (messy) wires and switches, allowing office workers a greater degree of flexibility and freedom with their compute devices. Beyond laptop computers, many Smartphone's and mobile devices began supporting wireless access. But if you are away from your office, what do you do?

Free Internet WiFi is popping up everywhere. Companies (like Panera Bread, Barnes & Noble, Starbucks and McDonalds) with multiple locations offer Free WiFi. Add to that local libraries, airports, hotels, stores and other public services and parks, it is becoming easier to stay connected when you are on the road. It is not uncommon to find business people camped out at one of these locations throughout the day as they perform work in-between or in preparation for their next appointment. Avoiding unnecessary trips back to the office is a key element of productivity, efficiency and saving money.

A growing number of local "WiFi Hot-Spots" are maintained by the telephone or cable company, offered to you for free as a part of your office or home service package or mobile device. Verizon, AT&T, Cablevision, OptOnline and Time Warner each have such a product. More information can be found by calling them or consulting their website.

The Internet has a collection of directories that list other free WiFi sites throughout the country. You can find them with Google or Bing, searching for "Free WiFi". There is even an iPhone App called "WiFi Finder". While many of these "Hot-Spots" impose a time limit on usage at various times of the day, not all do and sometimes you don't need a very long time to perform a specific task.

Unfortunately, there is NO free lunch here. Don't forget about **security**. These free / open WiFi hotspots typically do not have any security or protection for you, your computer or data. They often require you to accept their "Terms of Service", which makes it clear that this is your responsibility and you will not hold them responsible if something happens. Be sure to take the minimal precautions:

- Make sure you device / laptop has anti-virus / anti-malware protection.
- Avoid using software or sites that transmit passwords or confidential information in clear text. If you do, be sure the website you are visiting are encrypted (i.e. HTTPS).
- Use a VPN connection back to your office whenever possible.

The material presented here only scratches the surface. If your job has you on the road or traveling, if you are planning a trip or expect to be away from the office for a period of time, plan ahead. You CAN be productive and stay connected from almost anywhere.

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