

## the **digitaledge**—Your Wi-Fi Adventure

By Benjamin D. Kern

You're leaving the office early for a relaxing holiday weekend at a remote cabin. You finish your document, compose an e-mail, and click "Send." You grab your laptop, jump in the car, and off you go to your destination. Hours later, your BlackBerry® buzzes with a message explaining that your client has had a change of heart on a few minor points.

The changes should take only fifteen minutes, but you can't use your BlackBerry. Half an hour ago, you passed an exit with signs for Starbucks® and McDonalds®. Now, you only see wineries, a pizza place, and a gas station. In this situation, do you:

- (A) Tell your client that you'll need a few hours, and drive back to the office;
- (B) Use a broadband card to connect to your office, make the changes, and continue merrily on your way;
- (C) Turn around, drive back to the Starbucks or McDonalds, and use their commercial Wi-Fi connection; or
- (D) Search the pizza place, gas station, and nearby homes or businesses for an open Wi-Fi connection that you can use?

If you answered **(A)**, you should be proud of your old-school sensibilities and commitment to client service.

Those who chose **(B)** may be frequent travelers or lawyers with generous technology budgets.

- Wireless carriers commonly offer dedicated data cards for laptops (or phones that can be connected to laptops) with decent connection speeds. Mobile broadband solutions, including Wi-Max networks, offer a subscription-based alternative to Wi-Fi.
- Mobile broadband also can be used in conjunction with Wi-Fi. Portable hotspots like the MiFi device now offered by several carriers allow serious travelers to use a pocket-sized, group-friendly Wi-Fi hotspot anywhere that mobile data services are available.

**(C)** is the right choice for risk-averse drinkers of expensive coffee.

- Many restaurants, coffee shops, and hotels offer free or pay-per-use Wi-Fi to customers. Buy your coffee, point your mouse to the icon on your screen that says, "wireless networks are available," open your browser, and you'll be ready to go.
  - Check with your firm's IT staff before you use any remote method of accessing your work network. Many firms use end-to-end encryption, such as Virtual Private Network (VPN) connections or encrypted Citrix platform. Don't use open Wi-Fi to transmit sensitive data unless your IT group has implemented proper security.
- Also, be sure to buy a cup of coffee if Wi-Fi is for patrons only.

If you chose **(D)**, some would call you a Wi-Fi bandito.

- Although many companies and people secure their networks for private use only, it is still fairly common to find networks that are open for public access.
- You can find these networks by scanning around with your laptop open, or you may be able to use a Wi-Fi-enabled phone to help you scan. If you like gadgets, you also can use devices like those offered by Canary Wireless to help find open networks.
- Look at the network ID of the open networks for names that suggest they are associated with a civic group, park or library, a community networking group like NYCWireless, or others that share their bandwidth.
- Watch for traps. In airports, for example, it's common to find network names like "Free Internet." Check your computer's description of the network carefully before connecting. If the network is an ad-hoc or computer-to-computer network (represented in Microsoft Windows® Vista or 7 by an icon showing several computers in a group), the connection may be a scam that is designed to steal passwords and other private information.

Lawyers have many options when an Internet connection is needed on the road. As long as you choose a network carefully and ensure that your laptop and office network support end-to-end encryption or other security measures, a Wi-Fi adventure may save your next vacation.

See "*Whacking, Joyriding and War-Driving: Roaming Use of Wi-Fi and the Law*"

([www.abanet.org/buslaw/committees/CL320010pub/newsletter/0009](http://www.abanet.org/buslaw/committees/CL320010pub/newsletter/0009)) for more from this author on the use of Wi-Fi.

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