

THIS & THAT

by
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Are you well connected? I know. That question has several meanings. This time, I'm using it to mean *well connected to the Internet*.

I love the way Internet Service Providers throw terms around when they try and sell us on the idea of using their service to connect to the 'net...not. They don't tell it like we need it in order to understand it. (What did he say?) We do need a Service Provider if we want to connect our computer to the Internet. Companies do sell that service, and we buy it. But do we really understand what we are buying all the time? If I'm any judge of that, based on what I do, my guess is that we all buy things, from time to time, without fully understanding just exactly what we pay for. I really find it hard to fully understand the wording contained in any of my several insurance policies. I don't always read the fine print before I sign. I know I should, but don't always do it.

I believe companies rely on this when they create ads for their products, and Internet Service Providers are right up there at the top of the list. Let's see if we can cut through some of the hyperbole used on the subject of Internet Connection this time in This & That.

Let's talk about the different ways we can

connect our computer to our Internet service provider. There are six different ways we can choose from to do this. The terms used to name each of these ways are:

1. Dial-up
2. DSL
3. Cable
4. Satellite
5. Wi-Fi
6. Wireless

All six will do the job. Each, however, does it in a different manner. All six, on their own, only accomplish one thing for us. They connect our computer to our service provider's computer, and that's all they do.

Dial-up and DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) use telephone company wires to make the connection.

Wireless uses our Cell Phone access to accomplish the task. Wireless Internet Service, like our Cell Phone, uses radio signals to connect our Cell Phone to a place where the signal can be hooked into a wired network. We must then hook our Cell Phone to our computer if we want to use the computer for the Internet. However, we could just skip the computer, and use the Cell Phone for Email and the like if it was equipped to do this.

Wi-Fi is like a Cell Phone connection except that it's much faster, and you don't use a cell phone at all. You use a special Wi-Fi circuit card in your computer; which is usually a notebook type computer because the idea here is portability. With Wi-Fi, your computer must be physically located within a Wi-Fi *Hot Spot*, that is a reception area, for it to work. Wi-Fi hot spots are often set up when a business buys a subscription to a Wi-

Fi service in an area where many people congregate with their computers. Coffee shops, hotels, computer cafes, and airports, are just a few examples of this. You don't usually have to pay for using this type of connection. Businesses pay for access, and then supply it to you as a courtesy. You could, however, pay for the service yourself, enabling you to use your computer anywhere a Wi-Fi transmission node exists.

Satellite is another form of radio wave signal transmission. The signal goes from the computer to a satellite dish. From there it goes to a satellite in space, and then back to earth where it's received by the Service Provider's computer. Of the three radio wave services (Wireless, Wi-Fi and Satellite) Satellite is by far the slowest. On a scale of 1 to 200, where 1 is equal to the slowest connection speed (dial-up), Satellite would be a 5 or a 7. Wireless, that is through your cell phone, would be about an 80. Wi-Fi comes in at a whopping 195. Another factor here is that Satellite service can cost as much as \$60.00 to \$100.00 a month. (Wireless \$80.00 a month, and Wi-Fi around \$22.00 a month). Because of its relative low speed, and high cost Satellite is used mainly when access through any of the other services is not available, or costs too much (such as in very remote areas where all telephone calls are toll calls).

For those of us who prefer to connect through a wire that's brought to our house we can use a Dial-up, DSL, or Cable service. All three are hard wired connections between our computer and our Service provider's. All three operate at different speeds and are usually priced accordingly. Referring back to our 1 to 200 scale, Dial-up is still the slowest;

coming in at 1. DSL is next at 50, while Cable claims the number 100 spot.

By the way, you can interpret the numbers I've used to be speed multipliers, that is, Cable at 100 is one hundred times faster than dial-up, which comes in at 1.

A lot of confusion exists around the actual speed a person gets for the money when it comes to DSL and Cable. Consider this, cable uses a single wire to transmit internet signals. And many subscribers can use the same wire at the same time to surf the Web. Because of this, the maximum speed any one computer receives can be lowered as each additional computer comes on line. DSL, however, provides each subscriber with a dedicated wire. Only you use your wire.

Now, having said that, in truth, it takes a very large number of computers using a common Cable wire before your actual service speed is reduced, and even then the reduction is small. A cable wire can service many, many computers, and still allow each computer its top speed of 100 (on our scale).

One more thing, Just like Cable, DSL requires a special wire into your house before it will work. Your neighborhood must be wired for this before you can get DSL. That's because of a line length limit on DSL wires. Your house must be less than 3½ miles from a telephone office or your connection will not work.

I use Cable. It's costly, but it's what I need. I enjoy writing books for young people. I place my characters in real historic settings, and need to research those settings. I'm on the 'net a lot. If it wasn't for that, and my wife's addiction to Ebay, I would use Dial-up. It's more than enough for casual Internet use,

including Email.

If you want to view a chart, comparing all six services, you will find one, on the 'net, at <http://www.myrateplan.com/internet/compare.php>

Hope I haven't confused you even more with what I've said here.

By the way, all these methods of connecting to the Internet I've explained here, do only one thing for us. They just connect our computer to our service provider's computer. Most of the time that means connecting from our computer to a computer somewhere in the Atlanta area. Once connected there, our Service Provider connects us to the actual Internet. It's sort of like when we want to place a long distance phone call. The wire from our house connects us to our local phone provider. That phone provider then connects us to the long distance system.

Isn't all this stuff fascinating? Who just giggled?