

# WiFi - the new air conditioning

By Smythe Richbourg

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I have been saying this for months - finally, it's reported from a business owner who gets it!

I am a fan of free WiFi. I think those who sell internet access by the minute have not grasped the economic potential of the service. The idea is not to make it a profit center itself, but to use it to draw people in, where they buy more of whatever you have. If you're a coffee shop, you'll sell more coffee. If you're a hotel, you'll have more repeat visitors, and they will suggest you to their colleagues, because the group can have a meeting in your lobby. If you're a city park, nice people will come out and work there, making vendors and performing groups want to rent your park or pay to register their hot dog cart, because there are always people sitting around using your WiFi.

So now, Daily Wireless is reporting that a company that's been testing adding WiFi to jukeboxes in bars and pubs has found - wait for it - "customers stay longer and spend more at venues where they can log on." (See the entire article linked below.) Now, as Mac users, we've been using (or at least lusting after) WiFi since before the moniker was coined. We know it as AirPort, and Steve Jobs held it aloft in a Tangerine iBook at MacWorld in 1999. I remember watching it on the big screen at NC DPI over satellite - there were only about 2 dozen people in the room, but they all gasped and burst into spontaneous applause. These were traveling educational consultants. They had been using laptops and the web for years. They knew the power of the Internet, and knew the power of portable computing. Suddenly, here was a technology that brought them together, that could free them from the tyranny of finding a modem port, a free Ethernet jack, all that stuff. Who wouldn't cheer?

[http://dailywireless.org//modules.php?  
name=News&file=article&sid=3109&src=rss10](http://dailywireless.org//modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3109&src=rss10)

So, five years later, and WiFi is suddenly a new thing invented by PC users. No problem, we're used to that. They've stolen everything from mice to the trash can. But the infrastructure, the public access points, are being locked down by two forces. One, the entrepreneurs who want to make a quick buck on a fad. And two, those who want

to make it dependent on what hardware or OS you are using.

Right now, WiFi is new, and, for many, it's still untested waters. Folks with fully functional laptops (Macs and PCs) don't know that they can just walk in to a place with WiFi, open that laptop up, and be online. It seems too easy. But for the current college and high school students of the world, it's not only easy, it's expected. So, we know it's coming, but what can we do to help it along? How do we help those businesses know about it? Well, first, patronize those places. When you're ordering your sandwich, just ask, "Do you have free WiFi here?" When the clerk looks at you strangely, smile and say, "You know, wireless internet access." They may or may not have it, but thank them anyway, showing the appropriately sad, "Gee, guess I'll have to take my sandwich elsewhere" look if they don't. If they do, smile, say, "Great!" and add on a cookie - or size up your coffee order. Let them know that, because you can get some other things done, they will make more money.

Also, make sure folks see that you're using a Mac to access the internet. Sit where the glowing Apple on the back of your screen can be seen. Hey, these things don't win design awards for nothing! They're snazzy units! If some poor Windows user asks for help with their PC, smile and say, "Gee, I don't know. My Mac just does it, I don't know how to use Windows." (Unless, of course, you LIKE spending your lunch hour in the depths of some silly configuration dialog written by someone that doesn't really want you to get what you want!) Nothing I like to see more than two PC guys in a coffee shop, one whose machine is online, but he's trying with all his might to get the other person online. Warms my heart.

I usually do this before I order, and am fully prepared to walk out if they don't have free access. But, then, I'm a bit demented and on a mission. But I've found it does two things. (Well, three, if you count irritating some of the wait staff.) First, it gets the issue on the radar. One person asking creates an awareness. Two people make it an issue. Three or four asking, and even the biggest slacker is going to tell the owner, "Hey, are we ever getting WiFi? These people are bothering me to death about it."

The second thing asking does is to let them know it is expected. I loved the quote near the end of that article about air conditioning - "Used to be you put a sign up advertising that you had air conditioning and people came in. Now, you put up a sign that says you have wireless Internet access instead." As a kid, I remember

seeing signs on stores, restaurants, and movie houses advertising air conditioning. "20? cooler inside!" "Beat the Heat!" And not once did I see someone at the door, trying to charge patrons for the "service" they were getting! It's part of the building, fer crying out loud! Just because you CAN meter it and charge for it, doesn't make it the right thing to do! And those of us who are using it now will quickly change to the free spots as they open up.

So, why is this on the TMUG site? Well, we have a great free WiFi hotspot where our meetings are held. I know at least two members who use this time to do updates, since they only have dialup access at home. And here is a place where you can get all your wireless questions out in the open, so that you can be untethered in all your wanderings about the area.

If you're not part of the wireless world, ask some of the folks you see at meetings with laptops what they think about those units. I'm typing this on a laptop, but I have another monitor hooked up, an external keyboard and mouse, and the laptop is boosted up to eye level. I have a similar set up at my office. Yet, when I want to go upstairs, or over to the couch, I can unplug and do it. You'd be surprised how much more you like surfing and reading on the internet when you can do it where you want to, rather than "going to the computer" to do it.

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