

What's Hot in the Hotspots?

Did you ever think you could unwind at your local McDonald's with a Happy Meal and a side of Wi-Fi Internet access? Now, you can wirelessly check email, surf the web and Instant Message (IM) your friends and colleagues while eating a burger, sipping on a latte at the local coffee shop, flipping through a magazine at the bookstore or passing time in the airport lounge.

Wi-Fi is rapidly becoming the most popular standard for wireless networking in offices, hospitals, homes, hotels, school campuses, airports, coffee shops, restaurants, public parks and even McDonald's. People with Wi-Fi-enabled devices such as Palm™ Tungsten™ C handhelds use Wi-Fi "hotspots" as access points to wirelessly connect to the web and their email. Tungsten C handheld users easily connect to a hotspot by turning on the handheld, tapping "Wi-Fi setup" and selecting the available network to which they want to connect. If users enter the same hotspot regularly, they can program the Tungsten C handheld to automatically connect to the hotspot and retrieve their email, as soon as the handheld is turned on.

There are currently more than 3,200 hotspots in the United States alone and more than 5,100 worldwide.¹ With the belief that Wi-Fi soon will become ubiquitous, this number is expected to increase significantly. Major market movers such as Intel, AT&T and IBM recently joined forces to create Cometa, a Wi-Fi provider that plans to deploy more than 20,000 hotspots within the next few years – 300 of those in McDonald's nationwide.

With all these Wi-Fi hotspots, who is actually using this technology? Executives on a layover in the airport who need to stay productive while away from the office; office campus networkers who need to stay connected to email and corporate data while away from their workstations; doctors who need real-time access to patient data at the point of care; government officials who need to send key information over a high-speed, secure network; travelers who need a place to check email and confirm reservations; hotel guests, whether at the pool, lobby or in their rooms, who need to connect with colleagues, friends and families; and average Internet users looking for a way to connect to the web anytime they are in a networked space.

Hotspot Facts:

Hotspots in the United States:

The more than 3,200 hotspots in the United States can be found in major hotel chains, such as Days Inn, Embassy Suites, Four Seasons, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Hyatt, Marriott, Omni, Radisson, Sheraton, Westin and Wyndham. Starbucks is well on its way to incorporating Wi-Fi in nearly 2,000 of its coffee shops in the United States. Soon, more than 400 Borders' bookstores will provide Wi-Fi access points to customers. Coffee shops, donut shops, bakeries, convenience stores and airport lounges also make up a significant percentage of public U.S. hotspots. Currently, U.S. airports with Wi-Fi service include Austin, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Flint, Greensboro, Los Angeles, Louisville, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Norfolk, San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle-Tacoma, Sioux Falls, Tampa, Toledo and Wichita.

Wi-Fi hotspots are not restricted to buildings or indoor locations. Talk about the ultimate place to get unwired, New York City's Bryant Park is Wi-Fi enabled and so are parts of Waikiki Beach on Oahu, Hawaii. In Long Beach, Calif., locals have Wi-Fi access along the downtown strip, and Tallahassee, Fla. dwellers walk under a "digital canopy" that provides Wi-Fi access to 12 blocks of the downtown shopping and amusement area. More than 80 percent of higher education campuses already have wireless access and 99 percent of schools are wired for Internet accessⁱⁱ, making it easy for them to add 802.11b access points. In a September 2002 survey by Morgan Stanley, nearly 40 percent of chief information officers questioned said their corporations are currently using or installing wireless networking on corporate campuses. Another 24 percent said they were considering deployment.

Hotspot providers such as T-Mobile, Boingo and Wayport offer customers a variety of monthly, daily and by-the-minute service plans. Plans range from approximately \$25 to \$50 a month, \$8 a day, or 10 cents a minute for people to connect to hotspots. Hotels offer guests hotspot access for as little as \$10 per stay. More than 150 free access pointsⁱⁱⁱ in the United States are available to customers with Wi-Fi-enabled handhelds or other devices. Several small coffee shops, retail stores and open spaces, such as Bryant Park in New York, offer free connectivity.

Hot Destinations with hotspots:

New York City – more than 100
San Francisco – more than 100
Seattle – almost 100
Chicago – more than 85

Los Angeles – more than 50
Washington D.C. – more than 50
San Jose – almost 50
Boston – almost 30

Major Hotspot Providers:

T-Mobile – www.tmobilebroadband.com
Wayport – www.wayport.com
Boingo – www.boingo.com
SurfandSip – www.surfandsip.com

WifiMetro – www.wifimetro.com
HereUAre – www.hereuare.com
Guest-Tek – www.guest-tek.com
Airpath – www.airpath.com

ⁱ www.wifinder.com

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Education

ⁱⁱⁱ www.wifinder.com