

Small Business News & Notes

Getting The Most Out Of Wireless

by Ron Sperano

(NAPSA)—A number of small businesses are finding that there are big benefits to implementing a wireless computer network. Being able to access e-mail, the Internet and the corporate intranet without plugging into a hard-wired network connection makes using computers easier and more convenient.

Although rarely a substitute for a wired network, a wireless LAN can complement your wired infrastructure by allowing employees to take their notebook from their desk, to the conference room, to their house and then back again, without hooking up to any wires. With hotspots increasingly available at many cafés, airports, parks and hotels, employees aren't bound to their traditional office space. And all of these benefits will eventually show in a company's bottom line.

A recent joint survey by Cisco and IBM found that small businesses that have implemented an average of 300 wireless users reap an annual savings of up to \$4.9 million. Additionally, 87 percent of respondents believe wireless LAN technology improves their quality of life. Respondents noted that the flexibility and convenience of wireless networks made their workloads easier to manage.

As if that weren't enough, the initial cost of going wireless is minimal. Many notebooks already have integrated Wi-Fi (the standard wireless LAN connectivity, 802.11b), and further wireless networks eliminate the direct cost of installing a wire, which reduces the indirect cost of user downtime when moving or adding employees. When helping SMBs install wireless networks, I encourage them to keep four key factors in mind:

- **Simplicity.** Will the network be easy to install and operate? Consider the type and size of the office space you have, and the

Four Factors for Selecting Wireless:

Simplicity

Scalability

Security

Battery Power



number of people who will access the wireless net.

- **Scalability.** Will the wireless infrastructure give you the freedom to add employees, change conference rooms, or alter other features of your IT structure as the business changes? Also, consider who in your office needs wireless. If you have fewer than 10 wireless users you can use a home gateway, which combines a wireless hub with router capabilities for shared access. For more users, you'll need to get a wireless access point. The square footage of your office will determine how many access points you'll need.

- **Security.** Although IBM notebooks have embedded security and the IEEE is constantly upgrading the security features within wireless LAN networks, consider using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to access internal documents. VPNs can be complex to use, so look for vendors that offer strong customer service.

- **Battery Power.** It seems obvious, but when choosing your PC vendor, don't forget that long battery life will keep your employees happy on their wireless networks when they are moving from desk to conference room.

It's time to start thinking about wireless networks for your company. The return on investment from dollar bills to happy employees will speak for itself.

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