

## **Connecting to the Internet while traveling**

There are a number of options for connecting to the Internet as we travel.

Here are nine ways RVers are using to connect:

1. Use a public computer in a library or coffee shop.
2. Install a landline or connect to DSL when you'll be somewhere for several months.
3. Use an email device to check email.
4. Pick up a WiFi signal in an RV park, coffee shop, bookstore, or truck stop.
5. "War driving," which is driving around until you find a WiFi signal. By parking nearby you can use their Internet signal. We have found signals at motels, public buildings, houses and other RVs.
6. Use a dial-up modem or central DSL line in a campground.
7. Use your cell phone as a modem, connecting with a cable to your computer.
8. Put an Mobile Broadband card in your PMCA slot or a USB port to pick up a signal.
9. Set up a satellite Internet dish, either on a movable tripod or roof mount.

### **More about each option**

#### **1. Public computers**

Public libraries, universities, and sometimes coffee shops have public access computers. There might be a fee at a commercial establishment.

Cost: \$0 to a few dollars a session.

#### **2. Landline or DSL for long-term stays**

For long-term stays you might need to sign up for a landline to connect or connect to local cable or DSL. We have worked in remote areas where signing up for telephone service was the only viable option – places like the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, AZ, the Castellon area of Big Bend, TX, Bull Frog, UT. At one point some RV parks were installing modems for instant connections. Though most are going to WiFi, parks with older equipment might still have this availability.

Cost: Phone installation or DSL hookup varies, monthly access charge, Internet provider fee

#### **3. Use an email device.**

If you want to keep in email contact with family but don't have a computer, rarely use the Internet or don't have Internet access, you could look for an email device. PocketMail is no longer available, so look at Peek as an alternative. You could also use a Blackberry, iPhone or smartphone, though you can't save and organize your emails.

#### 4. Use WiFi signal in public places

One of the limitations of using WiFi you find in establishments like RV parks, truck stops, coffee shops or bookstores is that you may be charged a fee or need to subscribe to a specific service. Starbucks uses T-Mobile, Flying J has its own service that doesn't work anywhere else. At an RV park, if you use the daily rate, it is rather expensive, but signing up for longer periods wouldn't be advisable unless you were staying there long term or were sure your next destination used the same service.

The other drawback is that the connection may be unsecured so you should not transmit confidential or financial information on these connections. Even with a secured sign-in, those on the network could access your data so be careful.

#### **Free WiFi locator- WiFi Freespot.**

RV parks with WiFi: Do a Google search for RV parks with WiFi to return several sites. Some RV parks charge an access fee. Newer camping guides indicate if a park has WiFi. When you check in, ask for a site where the WiFi signal is strong. We have found that RV park WiFi can be unreliable – slow or not always working. If you absolutely must have Internet access, you'll want another method as backup.

Cost: Cost per session varies from \$0 to several dollars. If a subscription is needed, you may be able to get one for 24 hours, a week, month or year. If you have a newer laptop, WiFi capability is probably built in. If not, figure around \$100 for a card.

#### 5. War driving

“War driving” is a term for driving around an area and checking to see if you can pick up an unsecured WiFi signal, often with a WiFi detector. Once you find a signal, you can download email and use the Web. We've picked up signals from motels and other RVers that were unsecured and used them. Public libraries often provide free WiFi signals for patrons.

Be aware that in some places this could be illegal and a felony at that. In June of 2007, a fellow was arrested for picking up a signal outside a coffee shop. In Michigan, a law, introduced in 1979 to protect Internet and private-network users from hackers, and amended in 2000 to include wireless systems, makes piggybacking off of WiFi networks, even those without a password, illegal. Read the article. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2007/06/05/michigan-man-fined-for-using-coffee-shop-wi-fi-network/>

Under the Michigan statute, individuals who log on to a WiFi network with the owner's permission, or who see a pop-up screen that says it's a public network, can assume they're authorized to use the network. If not, they could be subject to prosecution.

It is important to have an Internet connection for many workers on the RV road. They can check forums, receive the daily Hotline if they are Workamper Plus subscribers, and research jobs and areas. There are times when your usual Internet connection does not work.

It would be difficult to know if you are in a jurisdiction where piggybacking on a signal was illegal. Perhaps the mistake this fellow made was coming back to the same location day after day and not getting out of his car. Had he bought coffee, he would have been a customer and entitled to use the signal. However, sitting in the same spot for days, the owner of the neighboring business got suspicious—not because he was using his computer—but because he thought he might be a stalker!

We do occasionally try to find an unsecured signal when we can't set up our Internet satellite dish for some reason. I'm sure many other RVers do the same at times. Keep in mind that you could be breaking the law. The best thing, if it's a coffee or book shop is to purchase something. If possible, ask the RVer (if you can determine who it is), for permission.

Cost: Most war-drivers search for an free, unsecured WiFi signal.

## 6. Dial-up modem or central DSL in campground

Some parks still have a central location where you can use their telephone or DSL connection to access the Internet. In this case you must subscribe to a provider like AOL or Earthlink and use their access numbers. If the hookup is DSL you would not need to use another provider.

Cost: Usually the use of a modem in a campground is free, though you may be limited in how long you can use the connection, particularly if others are waiting. You would need to subscribe to an Internet service, which is usually around \$20-25/month.

## 7 and 8. Cell phones and Mobile broadband cards or modems

<http://www.verizonwireless.com/smartphones/>

Many RVers are choosing to connect to the Internet using their cell phones or through an aircard, which receives a cell phone signal. There are three methods:

**iPhoneFirst**, use a phone or device that receives Internet data signals. PDAs or smartphones may be Internet capable. A PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) is a computer that fits in your hand. These small computers are sometimes called palmtops and are a great way to store telephone numbers, email addresses, access the Internet, make calculations, keep a digital calendar and play games. A smartphone is a mobile phone offering advanced capabilities beyond a typical mobile phone, often with PC-like functionality.

Many of these devices have a small keyboard to use and have their own operating systems or mini-browsers. You access the Web and send email right from your device. You will need a data plan that costs extra in most cases.

**phone as modemSecond**, you can also use an Internet-enabled cell phone, PDA or smartphone as a modem. With Verizon Internet-capable phone you use a USB cable tethered to your computer to connect; with a handheld device you must purchase a Mobile Office kit. You can check which Verizon devices work.

**Third**, modems or PC cards/Express cards are devices that transfer data. These go into your PC card slot on your computer or use a USB port. You can also use a modem on a

handheld PC and pocket PC devices. If you are in an area with broadband access, it works at very high speed. Certain modems can act as a storage device. See this article with more information. <http://cellphones.about.com/od/wheretobuy/tp/bestcellphonesites.htm>

RVers will want to look for an amplifier and an external antennae such as the Wilson Trucker's antenna so they can receive a signal where it would otherwise be weak. Our amplifier is a Wilson Direct Connection Cellular/PC Amplifier. The modem for a USB port can also be used in a router so you can share the signal with another computer. Be aware of usage limits so you don't exceed the allowance or you begin paying extra.

Verizon, Sprint, AT&T and T-Mobile have data plans. Even if you have a cell phone, in nearly every case, you will pay extra for a plan that allows access to the Internet.

**Cost:** Phones vary in price, depending on features. Sign a two-year contract and the price is reduced. The modems are often free or around \$20 with rebate at Verizon with a two-year commitment. Monthly service for a large amount of data runs around \$59.95. A few data plans are less expensive, with a smaller data allowance or if you use your cell phone to connect.

## 9. Satellite Internet

Working much like satellite TV, satellite Internet locks onto a signal and allows two-way Internet transmission. You can purchase a roof-mount dish with automatic satellite finder or mount the dish on a movable tripod. The tripod is a heavy surveyor's tripod, which should be anchored down with weights or tie downs so it does not blow over. You also need a place to store the tripod and dish for the portable one.

**Cost:** The equipment for the roof-mount runs around \$5,000; the portable dish on a tripod from \$1500-1900. Service plans run from \$59-\$250.