

Mobile hotspots—internet to go

It is one thing to say that the internet is everywhere, which of course is a popular generalization. Realistically speaking, it is safe to say that the internet is just about everywhere and depending on your location, access is free.

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I am continually amazed at how accessible the internet is. In North Dakota our highway rest-stops in have free WiFi, and even our dentist offers free web access, but the internet is not always available or secure.

Enter the mobile hotspot—using your mobile smartphone for WiFi access. I purchased a 4G mobile hotspot from my carrier (Verizon) that I use in my business and, to tell you the truth, it is very convenient and secure (security is relative, of course). The mobile hotspot is also reverse compatible if 4G is not available. However, once you start using 4G, everything else is lazy dog slow! (These hot spots, by the way, are not the same thing as "tethering" your mobile to your laptop, which often violates your service contract. You pay a fee to your carrier for a legit hotspot service.)

The advantage of a mobile hotspot is that it is ready when you are and it is a great deal more secure than airport lounge networks, coffee shops, libraries, and so on. Providing that the battery is charged (I carry an extra one) or if you have wall power, the hotspot is yours and yours alone, no sharing with anyone. Speed is good, providing the cell tower you are on is not bogged down with heavy use, and there are no limitations to file size (upload or download). You should be careful because some plans have data limits and you could be in for a shock on your monthly invoice if you download videos using your mobile hotspot.

Convenience, however, extends way beyond the obvious. Earlier in the year, my family and I were traveling. I was way behind on work so our son drove while I worked on my laptop. As I toiled on the road, I realized that I needed a document that was on my mainframe to complete the report I was working on. This is where it gets totally cool…

On the interstate, I pulled out and powered up my hotspot, connected and used Citrix Go-To-Pc to access my office mainframe. I logged in, accessed my document directory and downloaded the needed file, all at 70 miles an hour. How cool is that?

It wasn't long ago that we couldn't even imagine what we are using today and becoming very attached to. Access to the internet, to our mainframe computers, laptops, smart phones and tablets are all changing the social and business environment. In the past, the situation I just encountered on the road would have frustrated me because I would have had to wait until I returned to the office. We have all been there before. With a mobile hotspot and the right combination of connectivity, I can continue to work and not skip a beat.

The important message here is that I am continually re-configuring my business technology in order to stay relevant and connected. My business model requires me to be mobile in many ways. If a client calls or if I need to work on the road, security and access is critical. Our company could not survive without them.

What about your institution, are you reconfiguring to remain relevant? Is your technology plan adapting to the needs of your customers and their technology? Are you accessible or only open during business hours? Take a technology inventory of your institution relative to the digital state of technology today. You may be online, but are you mobile? Is the only application you can access away from the office e-mail? Many of your customers are mobile already.

While the cloud provides many benefits, the risks are huge, particularly when it pertains to storing customer information on a server that you do not control or have no idea how it is controlled. An alternative to using the cloud is secure remote access back to your server and secure WiFi access. The advantage is the ability to service your customers even if you are away from the office.

The Wombat!

About the Author

Dan Fisher is president and CEO of The Copper River Group, a consulting firm headquartered in Fargo, N. D., that focuses on technology and payment systems research and consulting for community financial institutions. For nearly 30 years, Fisher has worked in the financial industry using technology to improve the bottom line. He was CIO of Community First Bankshares (now part of BancWest), has served as a director of the Federal Reserve Board of Minneapolis, the chairman of the American Bankers Association Payment Systems Committee, and was a member of the Independent Community Bankers of America Payments Committee. Fisher has written numerous articles on banking technology and the payments system. He has authored or co-authored six books and recently published a book titled, "Capturing Your Customer! The New Technology of Remote Deposit." You can contact Fisher at dan@copperrivergroup.com.

P.S. To understand Dan's nickname, check out "About the Wombat" on his website, www.copperrivergroup.com