Wi-Fi, or Wireless Fidelity, connectivity typically takes place through access points, or “hot spots,” that use unregulated frequencies in the same spectrum as appliances such as microwaves and most cordless home phones. Wi-Fi access can be set up in homes and offices, and in airports, hotels and public facilities, providing a convenient way to connect to the Internet, access e-mail or connect to a corporate network using a wireless device.

Wi-Fi speeds can vary depending on a number of factors such as signal quality from the hot spot’s access point, distance to the hot spot and how many people are using it at a particular time. Average Wi-Fi speeds are usually faster than dial-up, ranging between 2 and 5 megabits per second between the access point and the Wi-Fi enabled devices.

SBC Communications Plans Major Wi-Fi Deployment

SBC Communications Inc. has announced plans to deploy more than 20,000 Wi-Fi hot spots in 6,000 venues over the next three years and, along with Cingular Wireless, develop a service that integrates Wi-Fi and third-generation (3G) wireless service to enable customers to enjoy a broadband experience in the home, at the office and on the road.

SBC companies plan to offer Wi-Fi Internet service, called FreedomLinkSM, in more than 6,000 hotels, airports, convention centers and other venues throughout the SBC 13-state region. To make wireless connectivity available to as many customers as possible, SBC companies plan to:

- Use SBC public telephones and existing DSL or T1 services to establish hot spots, speed deployment and lower costs.
- Establish roaming agreement with Wayport, Inc., to provide offers SBC customers access to Wayport’s services in more than 650 locations nationwide, including 565 hotels, eight airports and 75 restaurants.
- Establish roaming agreements with other Wi-Fi service providers and aggregators.
- Use its relationship with Cingular to provide an integrated Wi-Fi and 3G service enabling customers to have Internet access virtually everywhere they go.

FreedomLink service will be available on a transactional basis with a one-time fee for a daily session. After the initial service launch, the company plans to offer users monthly subscriptions for unlimited access, with deeply discounted pricing for customers who combine the FreedomLink service with other SBC services and packages including SBC Yahoo! DSL and SBC Total Connections, the company’s flagship service bundle. Final pricing will be announced when the service becomes available.
MAKING THE Wi-Fi CONNECTION

For Wi-Fi connectivity at a public hot spot, a wireless device installed with a wireless adapter and its accompanying software is needed. The hardware for end users costs about $50 or less, but many newer laptops and PDAs already come equipped for Wi-Fi access. The software typically will detect nearby access points and identify the Wi-Fi provider. Depending on your usage, settings and provider, you can sign up for a monthly membership or purchase access on a transactional basis. Wi-Fi membership and subscription fees will vary for each Wi-Fi service provider.

The most common and widely deployed Wi-Fi standard currently found in homes and public hot spots is typically called 802.11b, which is capable of connection speeds up to 11 megabits per second (Mbps). Another emerging Wi-Fi standard, 802.11g, is even faster, offering speeds as fast as 54 Mbps. Because the standards are usually compatible, Wi-Fi users with a “g” standard network adapter can usually communicate with hot spots running on the “b” network and vice versa.

Wi-Fi IS IN DEMAND

The popularity of Wi-Fi has soared in the United States with the increased deployment of public hot spots, home networking wireless gateways and the decreasing cost of wireless equipment. Business travelers are enjoying the benefits of remote Internet access from hot spots located in airports, hotels and retail locations, and everyday Internet users are transforming their online experience by surfing the Internet from almost anywhere.

According to Gartner Inc., a global research firm:
- Approximately 4.7 million North Americans will use Wi-Fi hot spots this year.
- About 99 million people will have Wi-Fi-capable computers by 2006.
- Almost 31 million Wi-Fi users are expected in 2007.