

CONNECTING TO WIRELESS NETWORKS – Public and private

The use of wireless computer accessories makes both our environment and mobility so much the more simple. Computers with wireless internet connections are not restricted to one certain room due to wire length or plugging in to a fixed plate in the wall. Laptops can travel from one room to the next unattached to the bothersome tether of Ethernet cables, and coffee shops and other “hot spots” provide a wireless connectivity to the Internet allowing you to browse the web and check your email all while enjoying your favorite latte.

The majority of laptop computers are equipped with some kind of wireless adapter making the computer ready for connection to any service, either public or private, which is “broadcasting” a signal. Desktop computers, if not so equipped, offer the option of purchasing a wireless card or adapter to make it wireless internet ready. Below are some examples of wireless adapters for both laptop and desktop computers.



Figure 1: Bluetooth Wireless USB Adapter



Figure 2: PCI Express Desktop Adapter

The major difference in any wireless network is that of it being secured or unsecured. A secured network is one that will require the user to input some kind of password before being allowed to connect with the service, while an unsecured network (as in most restaurants or coffee shops) will allow the user to freely connect with no such restrictions.

Whether it is a public or private network, connecting to a wireless internet service is basically the same using the MS Windows interface. If your wireless adapter has been installed properly and is enabled, an icon on your Windows taskbar will show its status. Figure 3 shows the adapter being recognized by Windows, but not connected to any service. Figure 4 indicates a wireless connection.

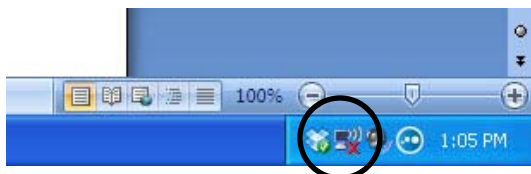


Figure 3: Wireless adapter not connected to service

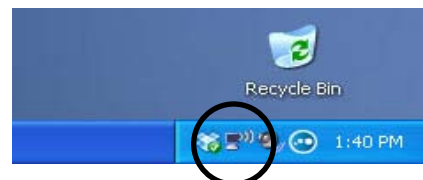


Figure 4: Wireless adapter connected to service

If your icon is not present on your task bar, it's possible that you have not enabled your wireless adapter. Most laptops have an off/on switch for this adapter. Consult your owner's manual for the location of the switch on your computer. When you right-click the wireless adapter icon, you will be given a small context menu with one of the options allowing you to view the wireless connections in your area.

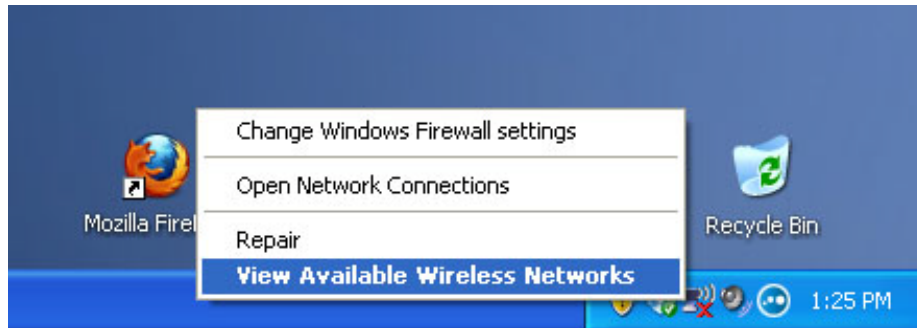


Figure 52: Context menu

Clicking this option will bring up a dialog box (Figure 6) where you can view these networks and showing if they are secured or unsecured. Networks are identified by their SSID (Service Set Identifier). Secured networks are usually marked with a lock icon and include "Security-enabled wireless network" in its description. Select the network you wish to connect to and click the CONNECT button at the bottom of the window. However, if you select a secured network, you will need to provide the password or passkey to allow you to connect. This information is provided by an employee of the establishment (coffee shop or motel), and some services may even charge you a daily rate to connect.

