

Recently, there has been lost of buzz in the media about WiFi. Why? Because some authorities are predicting that WiFi is the next Internet-like phenomenon. Think of it as the wireless Internet to start, but the implications for other applications havenn't even evolved.

What is it?

WiFi is the term given to the 802.11 technology, which allows for wireless access to an existing broadband connection. Accessible in an office, home or public space with a limited circumference, WiFi connections are nodes (points) on the network. The primary benefit of WiFi is mobility, as wires are no longer necessary for accessing the Internet or an Enterprise Network.

Today, you can access WiFi at over 13,000 unique nodes within Manhattan, although it is currently even more prevalent on the West Coast. Nearly 1,000 airports are currently wired and there is even an airplane on which you can get access. And CareDecision will install a Wi-Fi platform in as many as 65 hotels in the New York area

So what are the implication of this new technology?

Will WiFi cause the hype, investments and innovation that the Internet did at it's inception? Or will it crash and burn? Realistically, WiFi won't reach critical mass (if ever) until 2007, because ubiquitous computing is useless unless you have long lasting battery. New 6-8 hour batteries will be out this year making them standard fare by '07. Secondly, the chips being made now will include the WiFi capability on the chip—again, becoming mass market in 2007.

Until then, the target market for this technology is the 15-20 million mobile enterprise employees. That includes Insurance Adjuster, Sales People, and



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others who travel extensively or are "in the field" and would benefit from access to their Enterprise's Network.

How will WiFi users access nodes as they travel?

There are essentially two methods that are evolving. One is through non-commercial providers and the other is through commercial or corporate providers. WiFi access can be provided by an individual who has set up their computer for connectivity to the public. However, the computer may be turned off or have an unreliable connection. Or, a user can access a commercial network.

When, if ever, is this going to become common place?

If the first round is successful, due to the proliferation of chips that contain WiFi connection capabilities and laptops with increased battery life, we could see 45-50 million users of WiFi by 2007. At that point, it is predicted that use of WiFi will extend beyond computers and be incorporated into other devices such as cameras, PDAs, electronics and other home devices. Estimates range between 60-100 million devices with WiFi capability by 2007.

What does this all mean?

If companies are successful in establishing the infrastructure for the WiFi network, there will be a proliferation of new software and new experiences that will evolve from this technology. What will be the new email or the next version of person-to-person communications? What will be the new website or version of communicating information, allowing transactions or transmitting video data? This is what is really exciting about WiFi. And although one of the companies that presented at iBreakfast is now out of business, the potential of this technology is still very promising.