

Dawn's Databytes

Wireless Alphabet Soup

BY DAWN SANDERS

So, you are going to set up a wireless network. This and next month's articles will walk you through techie-land by first helping you, then showing you how to set up a wireless network at home and finally teaching you how to secure it. Here we go!

You bought a new wireless router, got it home and discovered that there is more to setting up the network than just plugging in the router. For instance, the instructions say you need a NIC card. What's a NIC card? NIC stands for Network Interface Card and it is how your computer connects to the network. Nick (no relation) at the store where you bought the router neglected to mention this. However, you need one NIC for every personal computer (PC) you are going to connect to the network. When you go back to talk to Nick, make sure to specify wireless NIC card.

Nick may ask you if you want ISA (Industry Standard Architecture) or PCI (Peripheral Component Interface Bus). Odds are you will want PCI, unless you are still using a very old computer. And if you are, you might want to upgrade before you go wireless. If you have a laptop, you need a wireless PCMCIA (Personal Computer Memory Card International Association) card—what a mouth full! PCMCIA is also known simply as "PC card."

Be sure to know which OS (Operating system) your computer is using. Nick, at the store, might ask and you do not want to look stupid. Most home computers are running a variant of Microsoft Windows. Windows comes in the following versions: Windows 95, Windows 98, Millennium, Windows NT (most common in the business environment), Windows 2000, and Microsoft's latest OS: Windows XP. Not sure how to tell which version you have? Just click on your Start button and look at the left hand vertical edge of your menu bar. It will have the OS in the menu's title bar.

Nick may ask you if you have an ISP (Internet Service Provider). Yes, you need one of these. No, they do not have to provide wireless services. ISPs provide access to the Internet. Most likely you will have a dial-up connection, cable modem, or digital subscriber line (DSL) to connect you to the Internet. So, how do they work? I'll explain.

DSL is also known in layman's

terms as a Darn Speedy Link. DSL requires a special modem that connects to your phone line. Cable modems piggyback on your TV's cable connection to connect you to the Internet. A dial-up service uses a modem card in your computer. The modem card acts like a phone and calls a computer at your ISP, which then connects you to the Internet. Your ISP provider will have more information on which types of connections are available in your area and which is the best match for your needs and budget. Don't be shy. Just call the ISP and ask for customer service.

Some say MACs [what does it stand for? Media/mandatory access control?] are also computers, but for networking it is the unique hexadecimal address assigned to your NIC card (remember NIC?). In case your math is rusty, hexadecimal is the base 16 numbering system used to represent binary numbers. Believe it or not, every single solitary NIC and PCMCIA card has a unique MAC address. This is important because you may need to know your NIC card's MAC address to secure your network.

Secure your network? Who's going to break in? Unfortunately, nobody has to physically break into the physical space where your computer is to use your wireless network. Your wireless access point, which is another term for the wireless router you bought that started this whole thing, will broadcast its location so that other wireless devices can find it and connect. That is how it is suppose to work.

Two more acronyms to go! As you set up your wireless system, you may run across TCP and IP. TCP stands for Transmission Control Protocol. IP stands for Internet Protocol. TCP/IP is just shorthand for the two protocols TCP and IP. Your computer uses these protocols to identify itself and find other computers on the Internet.

I realize that it seems like a lot to remember, but like my high school physics teacher told me, "In the real world, you just look this stuff up." Good places to do that are:

- Definitions for thousands of the most current IT-related words: <http://whatis.techtarget.com>
- Acronym finder: <http://www.acronymfinder.net/>

Next month we will go over some basic wireless network set-up questions and talk about securing your wireless network. Please feel free to submit your own questions to us at dawn@cdis-now.com and

please visit us on the web at www.cdis-now.com.

Happy Computing!
Dawn



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