

How to Get Online Without Wi-Fi

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Wi-Fi has been a standard feature on laptops for years. If you do a lot of traveling, Wi-Fi will allow you to get online at hotels and coffee shops along your route, but what if you need to connect between stops? Here are options that will allow you to connect your current laptop to a 3G/4G data network.

Phone tethering and Wi-Fi hotspots

Using your smartphone's data connection to access the Internet with your laptop is referred to as "[tethering](#)." You can connect the two via USB cable or by using your smartphone to broadcast a Wi-Fi signal, turning it into a "Wi-Fi Hotspot." If your phone offers this feature, be aware that some data plans include tethering and some plans may require you to pay a fee for the option. Here are what the four major carriers charge for smartphone tethering:

- [AT&T](#) charges an additional \$20 per month on top of data plans (which start at \$15 per month) for the ability to tether or use your phone as a hotspot.
- Sprint offers data plans that include the ability to use your phone to tether or as a hotspot for \$45 per month.
- T-Mobile charges an additional \$14.99 per month on top of data plans (which start at \$30 per month) for the ability to tether or use your phone as a hotspot.
- Verizon offers data plans that include tethering/hotspots for \$30 per month.

USB modems

If you don't have an [Internet](#)-capable phone or don't want to use it for tethering or as a hotspot, another option is to use a USB modem. The modem plugs into a USB port on your laptop and is able to send and receive data via 3G and 4G networks:

AT&T offers five models (four 3G and one 4G) USB modems ranging from free to \$49.99 with a two-year contract or \$49.99 to \$89.99 without a contract. Data plans that can be used with these modems start at \$35 per month for 3G and \$50 per month for 4G.

- Sprint offers four models (one 3G, one 4G, and two 3G/4G) ranging from free to \$49.99 with a two-year contract and \$199.99 to \$249.99 without a contract. Sprint data plans start at \$44.99 per month.
- T-Mobile offers two 4G models, free and \$79.99 with a two-year contract and \$124.99 and \$174.99 without a contract, with data plans starting at \$39.99 per month.
- Verizon offers four 4G models, both new and used, ranging from free to \$79.99 with a two-year contract, \$249.99 each without a contract, with data plans starting at \$30 per month.

Mobile hotspot routers

A USB modem works well if you have only one device to connect. If you have multiple devices, a mobile hotspot router is the better solution. Often referred to as MiFi, after the first company to release such a device, you can generally connect up to five devices to the router that uses Wi-Fi from a mobile carrier's data plan. Here are the MiFi offerings from the top four mobile carriers, each requiring a data plan at the same rates listed for the USB modems:

- AT&T offers a 3G model for \$49.99 with a two-year contract, \$299.99 without a contract.
- Sprint offers three models (one 3G, two 3G/4G), ranging from free to \$79.99 with a two-year contract, \$49.99 to \$279.99 without a contract.
- T-Mobile offers a 4G model for \$79.99 with a two-year contract, \$124.99 without a contract.
- Verizon [offers three models](#) (one 3G and two 4G), ranging from \$29.99 to \$99.99 with a two-year contract, or \$269.99 each without a contract.

What works best for you?

If you've got a laptop, and depending on your specific needs, one of these methods should help you get online while on the road, allowing you Internet access from anywhere you can get 3G/4G coverage. Also, if you're looking for a new laptop, you may want to consider one with 3G/4G built in.