

Ask Mr. Modem! – January 2012

www.MrModem.com

Retrofit Laptop with Wireless

Q. Can an older laptop be made wireless and use a wireless carrier such as Verizon? I would want everything to operate the same as it is now using my desktop computer. Would I be able to use Internet Explorer and be able to access all of the Web sites that I can with my current computer? I am using Verizon for my cell phone and thought I might be able to use their Internet access if I can use the same programs and visit the same Web sites.

A. While virtually all new laptops are configured for wireless connectivity, an older laptop can generally have a wireless network card installed, if it doesn't have one, to make it WiFi-ready. That's not a big deal, but it really depends on the computer. Any reputable computer repair person or service can examine your laptop and quickly determine what it will need, if anything. Even easier, since you are using Verizon, take your laptop to a Verizon store and ask one of the young techies -- who will try desperately to avoid making eye contact with you -- to take a look.

Understanding wireless connectivity can be a bit confusing, but "connecting wirelessly" means exactly that: It's establishing an Internet connection that's wireless. What you do online or what programs you use, such as Internet Explorer, is up to you. The connection doesn't care what sites you visit or what programs you use with it. It's a bit like buying a new car and asking "Will it drive to San Diego?" The car doesn't care where it goes.

Q. All of a sudden when I open a message, the screen doesn't go all the way to the bottom and I can see the other screen behind it. I can grab the edge and pull it down, but it's aggravating. Is there a way I can fix it so it will be like it was?

A. It sounds like the window isn't maximized if you can see another screen behind it. Click the middle button in the upper right-hand corner or double click the Title Bar at the top to maximize the window so it will then fill the screen. That should resolve it.

Q. My computer is coming up on its third birthday. It's been working very well for me, but I would like to avoid what has happened in the past, namely having to replace it after a major problem occurs. How do you decide when it's time to replace your computer?

A. I'm probably not the best person to ask because I love gadgets and technology, so when newer, better, faster, shinier things come along, I tend to buy them, long before any major problems arise. (Yes, it's a sickness.)

For most normal people, however, there are two options: Periodic replacement within a typical three- to five-year window, or waiting until a problem arises. For some users, being offline or without a computer for a few days while one is being repaired, or until a new computer is

purchased, is not a problem. Mrs. Modem considers it a blessing.

If you're running a business or you have a compelling need to be connected daily and cannot afford any down time, having some redundancy is well advised. You might want to purchase another computer when your current one is a few years old, just to have another system that's configured and updated, so if a problem arises you can easily switch from one system to the other.

For most typical users, having a desktop computer and a laptop and/or an iPad or smartphone is a good combination and provides an appropriate level of redundancy.

Mr. Modem's DME (Don't Miss 'Em) Sites of the Month

History of the Supreme Court

This site, hosted by the Supreme Court Historical Society, is dedicated to the collection and preservation of the history of the Supreme Court of the United States. It does this by sponsoring educational programs, conducting historical research, publishing books, journals, electronic materials, fixing parking tickets, and collecting antiques and artifacts related to the Court's history.

www.supremecourthistory.org

PENoply

Keyboards may be today's preferred writing implements, but many people still prefer a good, old-fashioned fountain pen, which just happens to be the focus of this Web site. Here you'll find information about the fountain pen's history and the many different manufacturers that still produce these elegant instruments, such as Montblanc, Parker, Sheaffer, and Eversharp. Sharpie? Don't even think about it.

www.rickconner.net/penoply

Road ID

If you have ever been concerned about having a medical emergency and being unable to communicate with friends, family, medical or emergency personnel, this line of identification products can ease your mind. Hopefully, you'll never need to use one, but under the right circumstances, it could save your life. As an avid-yet-sluggish cyclist, I never leave home without mine.

www.roadid.com

“Mr. Modem's Top 50 Computing Tips,” and “Mr. Modem's Top 50 iPad Tips” are available on amazon.com. Each life-altering volume features 50 of Mr. M.'s all-time favorite tips.