WIFI TIPS

So you're sitting at the airport. Your flight has been delayed (again), and you can't help but wonder if your travel voucher for last month has been paid. No problem, you think. You're at the coffee shop. They offer free Wi-Fi. Fire up the laptop and check your bank account. Done!

Sounds great. Until you realize days later that one of the 200 people sitting around you "listened in" on your signal; has your bank login information; and is now sitting in a similar coffee shop in Aruba—all on your dime.

1) Only Connect to Trusted Networks - Are you the type of person who opens your smartphone or laptop and immediately connects to any unsecured connection? In today's wireless world, these free hotspots are increasingly easy to find. Beware though. To a cybercriminal with just a smidgen of experience, it can be relatively easy to create a free network to entice you in with your mobile device—only to direct you where he wants or grab any information you use. Stick to SSIDs you recognize, like those listed in public places that advertise free Wi-Fi. Following this tip will help decrease your chances of electronic eavesdropping, but a seasoned hacker can still drop in on your online sessions and steal your logins and passwords.

2) Look for Free Wi-Fi Accounts that Require a Login - The accounts that require you to enter a password you obtain from the business you're patronizing, or at least require some secure agreement page before gaining access, are typically safer than an unknown network without any security. Look for WPA encryption, if it's offered.

3) Use Paid Wi-Fi Access For More Security - Why pay for something you can get for free? Because that access point is likely to be more secure. By taking this route, you'll get secure login credentials, which should help toughen up the barriers against the free, but perhaps uncertain, Wi-Fi path.

4) Your Smartphone May Open Its Doors Too - If you're like many people, your smartphone is set to automatically connect to open Wi-Fi accounts. This can help save your cell minutes, and potentially offer faster downloads, too. But are you aware of what hotspots your phone is grabbing onto to when you're out? Check what's available before you connect, or simply go into your phone's settings and turn off the option to connect to anything and everything.

5) Don't Visit Free Public Wi-Fi Unless it's a Secure Connection - There's only one way that's absolutely certain to prevent free, unsecured Wi-Fi snooping, and that's avoiding free, unsecured Wi-Fi altogether. Is this going too far? Perhaps, it can depend upon the sites you're visiting. If you're checking the weather and local restaurants through a recognizable connection, you're probably all right. But, why chance it?

You wouldn't shout out your bank's login credentials in a crowd. But even if you did, that wouldn't ensure someone would use the information to wipe out your money. It's the same with using unsecured free Wi-Fi. Someone might steal your info. Someone might not. You'll never know until it happens.