

BUSINESS TRAVEL - INTERNET ACCESS WHEN YOU TRAVEL

Want Wi-Fi in New York City? Don't Bet On It

By Andrea Marie Thompson

The Paramount Hotel sits smack in New York City's Times Square and although the hotel ensures guests they have Wi-Fi access, on a recent business trip I found that it was almost impossible to log-on to the Internet from my room. Staying on the 19th floor of the recently renovated property, I thought Wi-Fi would be a breeze, but no. After several stops and starts, frustrated, I called the front desk. "Yes, sometimes it's difficult to access the Internet," I was told. "Keep trying, eventually you'll get in." Great.

Feeling my emails accumulate with every minute that ticked by, I kept trying and trying... and trying to no avail. Eventually I gave up. What I learned? Getting Wi-Fi access in New York City, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, is often an exercise in futility; confirmed by my boss when I returned to Miami. After chastising me for several emails I had missed from an angry client, and then explaining my dilemma, she softened, "Yuck. I know. Trying to get wireless Internet in New York is terrible."

The irony amused me. In probably one of the most financially, intellectually and culturally progressive cities in the world, Wi-Fi access is still a conundrum. A riddle wrapped in a mystery. So if you are planning a business trip to New York (or any other large city), here are some tips to lower your level of Wi-Fi frustration and make your visit seamless and successful, at least where Internet access is concerned:

--Ask your hotel's front desk (or better yet, the concierge) to be honest with you: "Can I truly get wireless access because I'm not bringing a telephone cord with me (to dial-up)."

--Ask around. Has anyone stayed at this hotel before and have they had any problems accessing wireless Internet.

--If, like me, you have problems after checking in, here are some options:

*You will inevitably have meetings planned. Ask if there is a free computer you can use to log in to your company email account. If yes, schedule a ½-hour before or after your meeting to do so.

*Non-profit organizations like NYC Wireless have been tireless advocates of free, wireless Internet around the city. Their efforts continue to pay off and visitors and residents can now log-on to the Internet in places like Bryant Park, Jackson Square Park and Wagner Park among other locations. You can also log-on at the New York Public Library.

*Starbucks has struck a deal with T-Mobile to create Wi-Fi access in many of their locations. However, when I tried to access the Internet at a Starbucks right across the street from the Paramount hotel I had no luck.

*Have a friend in the city? Go to their place to log on. Thank him/her later with a glass of wine.

*Wi-Fi access in most airports is now free and easy. What a concept! Log on to your account after de-planing and before going into the city.

*Call the office. Have your assistant or a trusted colleague log on to your account and read off any urgent emails you must respond to immediately.