Computer & Networking Technologies, LLC

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5 easy ways to speed up your Wi-Fi

There are few things more dreadful than slowly watching a webpage load as you're working to meet a deadline, or Netflix constantly pausing to buffer.

Internet problems constantly plague those who are just trying to get some work done or indulging in a movie binge. But there are a few steps you can take to ensure better, stronger Wi-Fi throughout your house, many of which won't cost you a dime.

Centralize and raise the router

The position of the router in your home matters a great deal. If you have the router placed in a far corners of your home, chances are, you get spotty (or no) signal on the other end of the house.

The ideal location of a router is as close to the center of your home as possible, in an open area, away from other electronics, with maximized visibility. The more walls, doors, and other obstructions near your router, the higher the chance of something interfering with your signal.

It's also better to keep the router higher. Routers tend to spread signal downward, so if it's resting low or on the floor, you're not maximizing your coverage.

Reposition the antennas

Routers come with one of two types of antennas, internal or ex-

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ternal. If your router has two external antennas, try positioning them perpendicular to one another -- one pointing vertically and the other positioned horizontally.

Reception between the router and your device is maximized when the receiver and transmitter are operating along the same plane, explains Alf Watt, a former Apple Wi-Fi engineer. Some devices have vertical antennas, others have horizontal. Having two antennas positioned perpendicularly ensures that the wireless reception is maximized.

If your router has only one antenna or an internal antenna, it will take some trial and error. Try either positioning the antenna (or the entire router) vertically and horizontally to see if one way works better than the other.

Power line network adapters

If you live in a large multistory house or there is no way to centrally position a router, the next best solution -- short of running Cat 6 to multiple rooms -- is power line network adapters.

Power line network adapters work in most modern constructions by utilizing the existing electrical wiring in the walls. Plug in an adapter near your router and connect it to your router via Ethernet cable. Plug in the second adapter in the room or area where you want coverage. From there, you can use another Ethernet cable to connect directly into your devices or into the Internet port on a second router.

Power line network extenders work in a similar way, but the second (or any additional) adapters emit a wireless signal strong enough for at least one small room.

Set up wireless security

It may sound pretty obvious to some, but plenty of networks are left open and unsecured. Not only is this a potential threat to users of that network, it can also cause dramatic slowdowns, thanks to users who leech off open networks and hog bandwidth by streaming videos or downloading large files.

Log in to your router's admin page by navigating to the router's IP address in a Web browser, then using the default credentials to sign in. This varies by brand, but it's generally very easy to find, often on the bottom of the router itself or in the product manual. Choose WPA2 as the encryption method and select a passphrase -- something you can easily remember.

Only share this password with people you trust to be on your network.

Upgrade your router

If you're paying for fast home Internet and feel like you're not getting what you're paying for, the hardware on your end may be serving as a bottleneck.

If it's been several years since you purchased your router (or modem/router combo), it's probably time to upgrade. Wireless and Internet technology have changed a great deal in the last decade, and many routers 5 or more years old do not support newer technology, such as 802.11n/ac, 5GHz, or Internet speeds in excess of 100Mbps.

The easiest way to determine if your router is the culprit is to look up the model number and compare its specs with those of the Internet package from your ISP.

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