How to Secure Your Notebook PC While Traveling

So, you're on the road again with your notebook PC, staying in touch with your club. Connecting to airport and hotel Wi-Fi services to access your email and communicate with your staff and members. Conducting business as best you can.

But how safe are your communications and data while you're on the road? Let's find out...

Personal or corporate VPN: A virtual private network (VPN) extends a private network (such as the one at your club or at your home) securely across a public network. This allows users to send and receive data across public networks as if their computing devices were directly connected to their private network. (Wikipedia)

A VPN creates an encrypted "tunnel" between you and the VPN endpoint (usually your club network) such that the public network (an airport or hotel Wi-Fi service, for example) cannot "see" your PC. If an attacker can't "see" it, they can't hack into it.

Personal VPNs are available from many sources, such as Norton, Cyber-Ghost and others, for a nominal annual subscription fee. Corporate VPNs are produced by all major network equipment vendors, such as Cisco, WatchGuard and open-source solutions. They're easy to use and work well with Windows and Mac PCs.

Personal Wi-Fi hotspot: You can use your cellphone to create a personal Wi-Fi hotspot for private internet access. This is particularly important if the public network is being impersonated ("spoofed") by an attacker.

Airport and hotel networks are common targets for attackers, who set up a network that is named the same as the airport/hotel network but is operated by an attacker. Connect to a spoofed network and the attacker is immediately on your PC.

However, by using a personal Wi-Fi hotspot on your cellphone, you access the internet directly. Note that personal hotspots can chew up lots of data, so if you use them on a regular basis, you will need an unlimited data plan to avoid excessive data usage charges.

Password vault: Most of us are pretty lazy when it comes to passwords. We tend to use the same password for multiple online sites, and we mostly avoid using super-complex passwords that are difficult to remember.

Password vaults make it easy to use a unique, strong password for each site we are accessing. One unique password for the bank, another for the Visa card, yet another for the insurance company, and so on.

Using a password vault is easy. You start by assigning your user ID and a strong password to each site. You can make up your own password or let the vault randomly create one for you (with 20+ characters if you like). Whenever you log into a particular site, the vault uses the assigned user ID and password to access the site.

If an attacker somehow gets into your system and snoops while you are logging in, no worries. Your logins and passwords are encrypted and invisible to them.

Like a personal VPN, password vaults can be had for a nominal annual subscription fee from a long list of providers.

Portable security cable lock: According to Gartner, a laptop is stolen every 53 seconds, often from hotels, airports and restaurants. At a minimum, it's a huge inconvenience to replace a stolen PC, even if the thief doesn't hack your computer.

Security cable locks allow you to attach your PC to an unmovable object (like a desk) so the thief is unable to walk off with your device. The lightweight and compact cables cost about $25.

Bottom line: If you want your PC to be safe and secure while you're traveling, at a minimum, this is what you need: a VPN, personal Wi-Fi hotspot, password vault, and a portable security cable lock.

Inexpensive protections that can pay off handsomely by thwarting harmful intruders.

Don't procrastinate – do it today.   **BR**

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