

Element 2 The Basics: Using Your Computer and Technical Support

You can get free experience using a computer at places like your local library. The Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), at <http://sbdcnet.utsa.edu/sbdc.htm>, lists SBDC locations where you can use computers and get help throughout the country. Other locations may be available through local community and senior centers, adult education centers and community colleges, etc.

However, you will probably want to buy your own computer. This does not have to be expensive. Computer recyclers refit and refurbish old computers and equipment, and you can often get a computer and monitor for \$300 to \$500. You can find lists of computer recyclers at <http://www.recycle.net/computer/used/>.

If a new computer is your preference, this does not need to be very expensive either – you can get a good computer and monitor for less than \$1,000. Office supply stores are good places to begin looking at computers. You can get your questions answered, use demonstration computers in the store, and so on. There are also many computer-buying guides on the Internet, linked to specific manufacturers, such as <http://www.infohq.com/Computer/computer-buying-primer.htm>.

Internet Service Providers (ISP)

Once you have a computer, you will need access to the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP). You can find ISPs by looking in the phonebook under “Internet Service Providers”, by asking at a computer retailer, or by asking friends or neighbors, which ISP they use.

Then it is a simple matter of calling the ISP and signing up for service. Usually the ISP will send you all the information you need to get Internet access, and the ISP will offer technical support if you need help to get set up and connected.

If you get on the Internet at a library or SBD Center, there is a comprehensive list of ISPs at www.thelist.com.

Four Ways to Connect to the Internet

Slow Option:

1. **A FAX modem, also known as dialup, uses telephone lines to connect to the Internet.** Most computers have built-in modems (older ones may have external modems). In many areas, this is still the only means for Internet connection. It is slower than other means, and you cannot make or receive calls on the telephone while you are connected to the Internet. Also, you may not be able to receive some emails, or download some Web pages, due to the



size of the files (from complexity of formatting, photos used, and use of color), that causes the download to “time-out” (or cease downloading because of delay.)

Faster Options:

2. **Digital Subscriber Line, known as DSL – technology that uses existing telephone lines to deliver high-speed data services to businesses and homes.** DSL is different from dialup because the connection is “always on” and you do not have to reestablish a connection every time you want to go on the Internet. To be able to use a DSL connection, you will need a network card and a DSL modem. Network cards are typically built into all modern computers (including laptops). Usually, your ISP will provide a DSL modem, although the cost may be added to your first month's bill (ask your ISP).
3. **Cable – if you have cable TV, the same cables can also be used to connect to the Internet.** Cable connections are very fast and, like DSL, are “always on.” However, cables are shared among all the subscribers in your neighborhood, so when there are many people using the cables at once, there may be times when your service is slower. To be able to use a cable Internet connection, you'll need a cable modem and a network card. Most cable companies will provide a free modem. The second requirement is a network (Ethernet) card. Practically all modern computers come with one built in.
4. **Wireless connections – known as Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) is another high-speed option that is becoming more available in rural areas.** As the name implies, with Wi-Fi you don't need to be plugged into any phone or cable lines. To be connected via Wi-Fi, first, you need to equip your computer with a wireless card (many laptops come with one included). Second, you need to be connected to a compatible access point in your vicinity. You can sign up for a Wi-Fi plan with a company that provides a network of "hotspots" (places in whose vicinity you have to be in order to have a connection). These plans come in two versions. Choose from "pay for play," where you only pay when you need to use somebody's "hot spot or the "monthly subscription" (self-explanatory).

