

Fixing Internet Problems

The Internet is not optional: Whether we're working or streaming TV, we need an Internet connection that just works. Some issues are the fault of your Internet service provider or your equipment, in which case there's only so much you can troubleshoot without calling tech support. Homes are full of things that can mess with Wi-Fi: a microwave, a thick wall, a neighbor's network. Microwaves operate on the same 2.4GHz frequency as most Wi-Fi connections, so don't put your router in the kitchen. However, if you have a higher-end router that's broadcasting at 5GHz, use that instead and avoid congestion, assuming that the device you're connecting to it can also operate its Wi-Fi connection at 5GHz. These dual-band devices cost a little more than the vanilla variety, but the expense is worth it if you live in an apartment building. Some mobile devices can even bounce between the two networks, depending on which one is providing the strongest signal at that moment.

You may have a modem from your cable company that comes with its own router. Those are bundled with the service by default. They're generally not as good as modems and routers that you can buy from the store. Your service provider usually will give you a replacement unit at no additional cost, if yours is faulty or damaged. So there are trade-offs between having a fast and potentially more advanced device of your own, versus renting one from your Internet service provider (ISP) that will help if your router experiences issues.

The higher the Wi-Fi frequency, the more easily it's blocked by walls, so there are trade-offs. Get around blockages by adding a range extender in the hallway or a power-line adapter in the room that doesn't have the router. Range extenders are basically miniature radio towers that your router and Wi-Fi enabled device can bounce off. It's like putting a mirror in the window to bounce sunlight into a spot where the light wouldn't otherwise directly hit.

Power-line adapters plug into a nearby electrical outlet and use your home's wiring to send data back and forth. This is possible because electrons can be used to send both power and data. So you use this adapter wirelessly on the end where your devices are, and the router uses another adapter on its end. The latter adapter connects to your router with a standard Ethernet cable.

Both range extenders and power-line adapters require power from an electrical socket, so make sure that you have one near where you want to put the device. Some adapters have Ethernet ports as well as Wi-Fi radios, so you can physically plug in a nearby desktop or laptop computer that has an Ethernet jack -- basically using the power-line method as a really long extension cable.

Slow downloads and stuttering streams can happen even when you have good Wi-Fi reception and no apparent issues on your end and the reasons vary. Sometimes the website or service that you're connected to is having problems. You can test this by just downloading or streaming from another website or service and comparing the quality of your result. Other times, your Internet provider is having a technical problem.

Check your Internet connection at www.speedtest.net for an accurate reading.

The next meeting of the Vernon PC Users' Club is Tuesday February 9, at 7:00 PM in the cafeteria at the Schubert Centre.

Call Betty at 250-542-7024 or Grace at 250-549-4318 for more information.