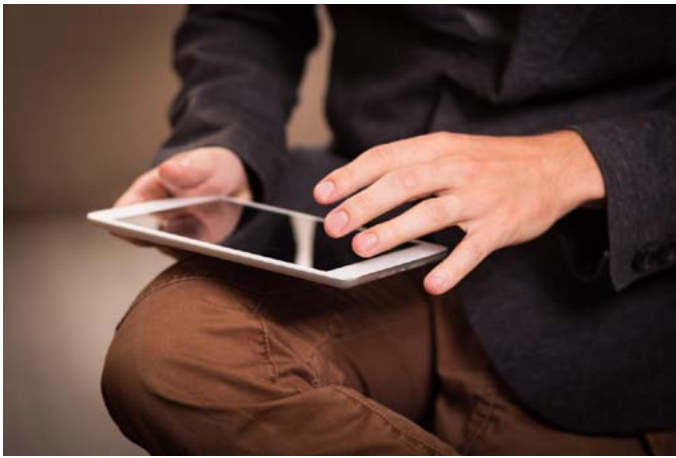




What is a VPN and Should You Use One? Part 2

by Ross Hendry



Choosing a VPN provider, how do you spot a good one?

You can use a VPN for business, school work, if you want to circumvent the geographic restrictions of living in France, if you travel or want peace of mind when using "Public" internet services. There are many VPN services available and the best of them offer a balance of services, here is what to look for:

Protocol

I am sure you have heard of SSL or Secure Socket Layer, and when you were setting up your router you may have seen settings like TLS, PPTP, IPSec, L2TP. These are different methods of one computer talking to another, like languages. Your chosen VPN provider should have a good range of these.

Provider and Exit server locations

Exit server locations are where the VPN provider is able to leave the internet via a server in the country that you wish to "pretend" to be. Depending on your use of the VPN, your VPN provider and its service locations are important. If you simply want to watch catch-up TV from one country say, USA, and your VPN provider does not have exit locations in that country, they are not suitable for you. If you need it for business or wish to do research on data that your country censors, then you need an exit location in a country without the censorship.

Anti-Spyware/Malware

Some providers include anti-Spy/Malware with their packages, this may be great, or it may restrict what you are able to download.

Supported Devices

Many of us have devices that connect to the internet that are not PCs. Mobile telephone, iPads, iPods, Kindles, tablets, watches, cameras, gaming machines and smart TVs. Ideally you need a

supplier that is able to offer you the same service for whatever device/s you use. Check out that they can do this for all of your devices.

Price

Do you really need to pay for your VPN? How often do you need these services? For most of us there are free alternatives. Those of you that have been here for more than a few years will probably have tried 'Hotspot Shield'. It was a free VPN that worked! However, the overhead was the pop-up adverts that would open and annoy you whilst you were using the service.

The current free VPN I recommend is 'Hola'. It works well with Google Chrome and has a fabulous range of exit countries. When using the free service, you agree to Hola using your current IP address for other free clients that need a French IP address. Clearly this is only if you are not using your IP at the time so it will not restrict your use.

In reality, if you are just circumventing the country restrictions to log on to 'Marks & Sparks' to order something occasionally, you do not need to pay - however, if it is crucial to you to see 'Home and Away' daily as it is released to the Australian audience, you may want to subscribe to a VPN Provider. These start from around \$4.00 (£2.80 - £3) per month or around \$40.00 per year, (£28 to £30).

This is a very easy way for Service providers to generate income, so please be careful on the provider you choose. Do your research and please, if you have any doubts, get advice from your preferred computer person.

Please also be aware that the companies that restrict you from using information if you are not in their country also have responsibilities. For example, there are International broadcast licences and agreements, so the TV companies have to prevent use from outside the UK for certain material that they provide. So they are always trying to prevent access via VPN and they work hard at it, so what works today may not do so tomorrow.

Finally, if you use a VPN like Hola, do not use it for all of your connections. Some email providers will not allow VPN access because using a VPN is a way of masking your true ID. My advice for all VPN use is to turn on and use your VPN when you need it, then switch it off afterwards and surf normally.

Ross Hendry is the proprietor of Interface Consulting and Engineering, who has over 42 years experience in Communications, Computer Technology and Direct Marketing. (See advert below).

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