



What is a VPN and Should You Use One?

by Ross Hendry

Why Do I Need a VPN?

The internet is a network of connected computers that uses the internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to link billions of devices worldwide. Essentially it is a network of networks, made up of millions of academic, business, consumer, government and public computers and other devices. These are all connected using all manner of Cable, Electronic, Optical and Wireless networking technologies to provide an extensive range of information resources and services, such as electronic mail, telephony and peer-to-peer networks for file sharing, cloud storage and of course inter-linked hypertext pages and applications you know as the World Wide Web.

The Internet is simply the biggest public network of computers and by its nature has to be accessible to all, so unless you take precautions your information could fall into the wrong hands.

Furthermore, the internet is policed by everyone! whether it is your Internet Service Provider (ISP) i.e. Orange, SFR etc., or the GCHQ, the CIA and many more organisations. You are also spied on by just about everyone on the internet at some level, although most are quite innocent just trying to improve your internet experience and trying to make it more relevant for you each time you search for something. But of course, there are criminals out there also trying to get information on you - to steal your identity or your hard earned money, and these are not just sad individuals but organised crime syndicates.

Each time you go online you expose yourself to these potential threats. Of course we all use anti-virus and anti-spyware to try to stop our PCs from getting infected (and these can and do protect us from most programs seeking to steal our information or use our PC for their illegal activities) but we still have to send highly sensitive information across the internet where it could be intercepted. This is where a VPN can provide a solution

What is a VPN ?

The abbreviation VPN stands for Virtual Private Network. Essentially a VPN creates a private network on the public network that is the internet. This means that when you use a VPN your information is encrypted, enabling you to send and receive data across shared or public networks as if your devices were directly connected to your own private network.

Many companies have their own VPNs so that their data is kept secure. VPNs allow employees to securely access the corporate intranet while travelling away from their offices. For example, you have offices in Bristol, Manchester and London. In the past you would have needed an expensive private system of cabling these offices together, now you can use the internet and secure your data by using a VPN to provide a secure tunnel through the internet between each office. Students use VPNs to connect to their University and or school to submit and receive assignments and other information.

VPN Technology is also used by individual internet users to secure their wireless transactions, to circumvent geo-restrictions and censorship and to connect to proxy servers for the purpose of protecting personal identity and location. I use mine to get information securely from my network at home, when I am working away from home.

Why should you use a VPN?

Simply to enhance your security and access resources on a network you are not physically connected to. What you use the VPN for is a different story.

Employees and Students have to connect to their school or company to access the network resources when they are at home or travelling. In this case the VPN and instructions on use are provided by their organisation.

Downloading. Many people download information from the internet, some legal and some not so! If you do this using torrents or some other sharing technology, the only way to keep it private is to use a VPN.

The Traveller. Whether you travel for business or pleasure you will probably connect to the internet in a cafe, hotel or other public place such as a station or airport; there are millions of free Wifi connections available worldwide but if you value your privacy and security use a VPN.

The Researcher. You do a lot of research and do not want to alert the competition - use a VPN. This will keep your internet address private.

You live in another country. Sometimes it is necessary to order goods or information from your home country. Because your internet address is prefixed with your country code you may be prevented from accessing the information you want as it is officially only available in your home country. Using a VPN you may fool the site into thinking you are in your home country.

Censorship. Many countries censor content on the internet, you can get around this using a VPN to simulate that you are accessing the internet from another country that does not have the censored content.

What Does it Cost?

The provision of VPN services has become less and less expensive and it is possible to find services for as little as £3 to £5 per month for each device. I have recently found a service that will provide VPN services for up to five devices for life (100 years in fact) for around £75. An offer I could not resist, the devices can be changed as you upgrade your hardware, as long as there are only 5 devices registered at any one time.

Why do I choose to use one?

Quite simply I travel considerably, mainly for business, and need my privacy and security - not only for my information but for that of my family, friends and customers. I also need to know that if I purchase online at one of these free Wifi spots that my financial data remains secure. Occasionally, I need to get info from my network at home, so I ensure that my VPN is on and I get a completely secure connection with my home and the computers I have connected to my network. It's very handy to check the progress of work I have left running, or to get the report a customer needs.

Next month I shall suggest what to look for when getting a VPN, how to choose the right one for your needs and recommend some service providers.

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).

In-expensive Computer help & support for Expats in Deux-Sèvres & the Vendée

- ✔ Troubleshooting & Repairs
- ✔ System Upgrades
- ✔ Hardware Supply
- ✔ PC Training
- ✔ Virus Detection & Removal

Tel: 02 51 51 50 06
Mob: 06 38 76 82 19
Email: rs.hendry@gmail.com
Website: www.seowise.co.uk



Location: 85120 Breuil Barret
Siret: 515 246 544 00016