



Travelers today have lots of ways to keep up with their e-mail

by Larry Magid

Recently I was in Barbados on a business trip. But just because I was out of the country didn't mean I was out of touch. My e-mail follows me wherever I go.

Whether or not this is a good thing is, of course, debatable. I would have rather spent more time at the beach and less time in front of a PC, but being in paradise didn't exempt me from having to earn my living.

Getting access to e-mail from the road is relatively easy now. If you have a laptop with a modem, you might be able to access the Internet with a local call, depending on what Internet service you use and where you are. But if you don't carry a computer with you, you can get your e-mail from any Internet-connected machine at a public library, a cyber cafe, a hotel business center, an airport Internet terminal or an Internet access service that you'll find in many business and vacation locations worldwide.

As you might expect, I tote a computer around with me wherever I go, and before I leave home, I make sure I have everything I'll need to log on when I get to my destination. If I'm traveling overseas, I find out what type of telephone jacks they use and go to an electronics or travel store to get the right adapter. All recent-vintage laptops have universal power supplies that work everywhere, but you may still need a plug adapter for whatever type of socket is used in that country. Some people claim that notebook PC modems from the United States can't be used in some countries, but that's a legal, not technical, issue, and in the era of worldwide deregulation, it's no longer even much of a legal issue. I've been to Asia, South America, Europe, Australia and the Caribbean and never have had a problem.

You might not be able to reach your Internet service provider via a local number, but there are ways to tap into it using a detour through one of the major ISPs. For instance, America Online, Prodigy, MSN, UUNet, EarthLink and AT&T WorldNet all offer national or international local access numbers.

If you're traveling out of the country, AOL offers numerous local phone numbers. You may have to pay a surcharge (typically about \$6 an hour, sometimes more) while overseas, but you won't have to pay for a long-distance call from most cities. Once you connect to AOL, you can still use your regular e-mail program and your regular e-mail address to AOL. AOL users should type keyword ``access" for more information.

If you're stuck in an airport and have access to one of the airline lounges, you can generally connect your PC to a phone line with a free local call. Several airports, including Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth and Denver have LaptopLane facilities where, for 38 cents a minute, you get your own little office where you can plug your laptop into a high-speed line (which requires an ethernet card) or regular phone line. You also can use LaptopLane's PCs if you don't have a laptop. You also have access to printers, copiers and other services. If you can't reach your ISP via a local call, find out whether it has an 800 number. You usually pay more per minute, but it may be worth it.

"We continue to gain evidence from the channel that Apple is likely to embark on a new product refresh," Morgan Stanley Dean Witter analyst Gillian Munson said in a research note. "This is a similar pattern to what we saw in the Apple channel prior to Apple's last big product release, the color iMacs."

A faster G3 processor or a G4 chip would offer a performance boost to the iMac, while consumers may also get hoped-for improvements to the keyboard and mouse. There also have been rumors that Apple will opt for a larger 17-inch screen.

Jobs also promised that a "public beta" version of Apple's new operating system would be available this summer, leaving many hopeful that CD-ROMs will be available at the show. At the least, Jobs is likely to offer a specific date for the test version, which he has said will be followed up with a final version in January.

Other possibilities include updates to the PowerMac or other hardware lines. But analysts say new models at the time of the August Seybold trade show is a more likely scenario. As expected, Apple had no comment on its plans for the show.

Financial results due Tuesday

As for earnings, analysts are expecting Apple to come in at 44 cents a share for its third fiscal quarter, according to First Call/Thomson Financial. That's an increase of 26 percent over earnings of 35 cents per share the same period a year ago. Revenue estimates have been hovering around \$1.9 billion.

Like Gateway, which reported earnings yesterday, Apple likely experienced a dip in consumer sales in the past three months.

The second calendar quarter is typically the slowest of the year. Nonetheless, analysts are generally optimistic about the second half. Apple will have new products out and will begin to expand its "beyond-the-box" revenue from items such as Internet connectivity and software sales.

"Traditionally, this is a slow consumer quarter, so we would expect the mix to be biased more toward (professional users). That could help gross margins," said David Bailey, an analyst at Gerard Klauer Mattison. "We're kind of looking for an in-line quarter and a very bullish story for second half."

Added Kurt King, an analyst at Banc of America Securities: "Revenue softness came from light iMac sales ahead of an expected iMac product refresh at Macworld New York in mid-July as well as the general demand softness we saw in U.S. retail during the course of the quarter.

"We expect beyond-the-box to become a more material (and positive) aspect of the Apple story during (the second half). Macworld could include some announcements in this area."

OS X comes alive

Apple users have had to wait years for a rumored "next generation" operating system, and they are hoping they won't have to wait any longer to try out the software.

Apple originally had said that a shrink-wrapped version would be on sale this summer but changed course in May, saying it would instead release a "public beta." The company has maintained that the delay is merely a change in terminology; Phil Schiller, vice president of worldwide product marketing at Apple, said previously that the public beta is merely the official name for the product Apple spoke about in January.

