

Wi-Fi Versus 4G

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4G; 3G; Wi-Fi; VoIP. You are not alone if you are confused by these acronyms. Small-firm practitioners hear these terms daily but may not understand how they fit into their firms. Many may ask, “What are the differences between these technologies, and what capabilities do each provide that can improve my firm?” The following is a summary of the differences between Wi-Fi and 4G and how practitioners can use each to enhance their client service.

Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi has been around for years. In a small-firm setting, many practitioners are familiar with Wi-Fi’s most common use – the internal wireless office network. In that capacity, Wi-Fi provides access to a server that stores our client files, the Internet and our daily emails. Because of its low cost and ease of installation, Wi-Fi networks were designed for personal and small corporate network environments. Wi-Fi technology can make firms much more efficient when dealing with client data. At our firm, we utilize Wi-Fi technology in many different ways: to forward notifications from our smartphones to our computers, send documents to our printers from any computer or smartphone and use our smartphones as a remote control for our laptops.

Even though Wi-Fi expands capabilities, it does have a limited range of access. Most Wi-Fi networks have a range of approximately 800 feet, which means you cannot stray very far from the router. In addition, Wi-Fi only supports data transfer, which means you cannot use the technology to transfer voice-based or video-based signals. Even with these limitations, Wi-Fi is a cost-effective, reliable tool for small firms and sole practitioners.

4G

4G, which stands for fourth generation network, is a relatively new technology, which many consider to still be in the developmental stage. Unlike Wi-Fi, 4G is not yet available worldwide but is available in North America and Europe. 4G technology is expensive and, due to its high cost of operation, is intended to be managed by mobile communication companies rather than small businesses.

But with higher cost comes terrific capabilities. We purchase 4G access from a mobile provider, and it provides us with 4G’s most appealing characteristic: speed. Everyone has a need for speed, and small-firm practitioners are no different. We all want our Internet and our email downloads to be lightning fast; 4G fulfills this desire. It has a transfer of data rate of 100Mbps, twice the speed of Wi-Fi. This increased speed allows for much faster uploads and downloads of content through email, the Internet and other 4G devices.

In addition to faster speeds, 4G supports both data and voice, compared to Wi-Fi’s data-only support. This capability truly changes the way we conduct business. With voice and data support, video conferencing on handheld devices has become more common. 4G makes our handheld devices just as powerful as our desktop computers by providing high-speed IP communication to smartphones, tablets and pads, allowing them to run Internet applications such as Skype and YouTube. 4G also features Voice



over Internet Protocol (VoIP) capability which is, simply put, telephone service through the Internet. With 4G’s VoIP access, a small firm can subscribe to a phone number in a region where it wants to do business but does not have a physical presence. For example, your main office is in New Jersey, but you service clients in California. You can subscribe to a phone number with a California area code, and all calls to that number would ring on your smartphone which has a local New Jersey phone number through your 4G Internet connection. 4G has just made the world much smaller for many practitioners.

Technology advances every day, and 4G continues the forward movement. It picks up where Wi-Fi has left off and provides us with speed and enhanced capabilities that allow us to conduct business in a much more efficient and effective manner. 📶

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