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The continuing move to wireless technologies seems to have reached virtually every corner of our lives, from wireless business networks to our personal gadgets that keep us linked up with all of our e-mail, work folders and other functions at all times. Businesses and individuals can now use cordless keyboards and mice, get their high-speed Internet through wireless networks, and use PDAs and smartphones to stay connected. Some printers are even available with wireless cards, further freeing users from the tangled jungle of cords and wires.

But as wireless as we are becoming, the technologies on the market share the same general capability of transferring data, which means there's still one cord that we haven't managed to cut: electricity. All of our computers, monitors, scanners, printers and portable gadgets with rechargeable batteries need power, which obviously means the need for power cords, strips, surge protectors and uninterruptible power supplies (UPS).

Intel, however, recently announced an innovation that may change this relationship we have with wall outlets. The company's new Wireless Energy Resonant Link (WERL) was able to wirelessly transfer enough energy to power a 60-watt light bulb from about seven feet away. This may not sound all that exciting, but this is actually more power than is typically used to run a laptop computer.

For clarification, Intel didn't invent the concept of wireless electrical transfer; Mother Nature's been doing this for eons in the form of lightning. And spark plugs, electrical welders and even trains have been using a form of

it for years in the form of an electric arc. Additionally, Nikola Tesla developed

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One of the new terms coined for the concept is WiTricity (kind of like WiFi). The initial development of using magnetic fields for the transfer of electrical energy was performed by researchers at MIT. In the comparably short term, Intel and tech industry analysts are touting benefits such as wirelessly powering laptops, phones and other portable devices by installing transmitters in public areas much like has been done with wireless networks. So at the airport, mall or coffee shop, users wouldn't have to worry about their battery charge or finding an available outlet. These devices would, of course, need to have a receiver built-in or added, probably in a similar fashion to wireless cards. In the office or home, plugged-in items like computers or monitors could have a transmitter built-in, allowing it to charge the smaller devices around it.

According to analyst Rob Enderle, this new power system could "eliminate chargers and eventually eliminate batteries all together." But this is still primarily looking at small devices. What about powering full computing systems, servers, even home appliances? Intel sees this potential perhaps by the year 2050, likely beyond any of our professional years. But still, within just the next three or four years, we should see these technologies coming to the market.

You Still Aren't Wireless?

On a related note, if your firm is still among the many that have not set up a wireless network but you'd like to, you've probably held off because of one of three reasons: security concerns, the potential cost, or you're leery of how much work it might be. Don't worry, though. Wireless networks can be set up pretty easily, they're cheap now and they can be made as secure as wired systems. In my next column, I'll go over the basics of setting up a small wireless network, either for your office or your home.

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Plus, it's about time the Internet was available during flights, since phone-based communication options have been offered for more than a decade and satellites have been beaming the web to millions in recent years. Of course, this means that frequent business travelers will probably be expected to be productive on these flights, instead of catching that wonderful nap so many of us enjoy. Ah, the joys of technology. Also, keep in mind that a nosy neighbor may be able to see a passenger's confidential e-mail, so be wary. The service will cost \$12.95 per flight, and as of this writing was offered on flights from New York to L.A., San Francisco and Miami.

Travel Pics?

Summer's long over, but every year during August, I suffer from varying degrees of wanderlust. Sometimes I can satisfy this itch with a long day trip or two, but occasionally I need to get further away for a bit longer. It probably is not a coincidence that most people in western societies seem to take their vacations or holidays during the summer months. Sure, it's warm and the beaches are inviting, but I wonder if there's something instinctive in the human conscience that makes this yearning for independence stronger during this time of the year.

I suppose that would be a better discussion for a sociology publication, but I'm curious about it nonetheless. So what did you do this past summer? Did you drive to the Grand Canyon? Hike the Appalachian Trail? Visit Europe? Or did you do something a little more local? Drop me a line and share some of your summer pics. You can e-mail me at editor@cpata.com. (Please keep the size of the e-mail below 4MB).

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