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## Cellular Vs. Satellite

Translated, this means that an accounting firm can field a team to a client location, set up its own secure network on the site, and work there for as long as it needs to. The device is portable, and the service plan is about \$40 per month. No need to use the client's network or public wifi sites. Up to five simultaneous connections and you are good to go.

**Dave McClure** • Nov. 06, 2009

Three years ago, I left the big city (Alexandria, VA) to move to the tiny mountain valley town of Luray, Virginia. It was a return to my roots as a small-town boy...a bit of a culture shock after decades in the city...and a place literally bereft of broadband.

There was DSL available...only not where I live. Cable stops about 300 feet from my house, and Comcast killed the project before it reached me. So I weighed the options of optical wireless or satellite, and elected to go with Hughes.net. Understand, I appreciate the fact that Hughes Satellite even provides service to rural customers. But between the service outages, the constant modem reboots, and the ridiculous service caps, I was not happy. I once spent 24 hours with sub-dialup speeds for violating the Hughes Terms of Service download limits — I downloaded a Microsoft trial software program.

So I was pleasantly surprised when both Verizon and Sprint began offering the Novatel MiFi product at a reasonable price. The MiFi is basically a cellular broadband receiver combined with a wifi router. About the size of four credit cards stacked together and with an impressive battery life, this little device is the NEXT BIG THING in rural broadband — and for accounting firms fielding audit and IT teams.

It connects easily, has WPA-secure wifi connections, and while it is only 802.11g and b-compatible today, an 802.11n version is in the works. It downloads at 800K to about 1 Mb — roughly twice the speed of satellite connections. Uploads are a little slower, but only a little. The wifi router can handle up to five simultaneous connections.

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So what does all this mean? For rural customers who can get DSL or cable, not much. You already have one of the best, low-cost Internet connections. But for those of us who choose to live on the side of a mountain or the middle of the wheat fields, this is a critical technology. It means we can use a cell tower, if one is nearby, to get decent broadband. The 5Gb download limit is not overly generous, but I haven't busted the limit in two months of average small-office use, either.

And what it really means is that today, in the Shenandoah River valley of Virginia, I have another credible broadband choice. And it means that I will be disconnecting my satellite connection next month to make the move to cellular broadband.

And if it is good now, I can't wait for the deployment of LTE starting in 2010.

Blog

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