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WIRELESS BROADBAND COMPARISON

In the past year, **wireless broadband** has become more prevalent, so let's talk about it.

First of all, what is wireless broadband? It is a high-speed internet connection provided by cellular phone companies, and allows you to connect to the internet whenever you are in an area where they have set up wireless broadband on their cell towers, freeing you from trying to find a nearby WiFi Hotspot. More accurately, it is **cellular broadband**, although wireless broadband is the term most commonly used.

WiFi Hotspots, such as coffee shops, airports, and so forth use wireless routers & access points to provide internet connections over short distances. Wireless broadband can work miles from the nearest WiFi Hotspot. It's like being in your own home or office and using the wireless connection there...well, not quite.

First of all, at around \$60/month (and usually with a 2 year contract) it's expensive – with a monthly cost higher than most premium cable & DSL internet connections.

Secondly, it's slower than wired (cable/DSL) connections. There are 3 different types of wireless broadband: **EVDO, EDGE, & 3G** and they are not all the same. Here are some typical wireless broadband speeds, courtesy of MaximumPC magazine. I'm also including some typical phone modem (ancient!), DSL and cable speeds for comparison.

Note that M = Mbps (Megabits per second) and K = 1000 Mbps.

Download means receiving data from the internet into your computer.

Upload means sending data from your computer into the internet.

Download speeds

Phone	0.028M	= (28K)
EDGE	0.119M	= (119K)
3G	1.19M	= (1,190K)
EVDO	2.6M	= (2600K)
DSL	2M	= (2000K)
Cable	12M	= (12,000K)

Upload speeds

Phone	0.048M	= (48K)
EDGE	0.132M	= (132K)
3G	0.145M	= (145K)
EVDO	0.748M	= (748K)
DSL	2M	= (2000K)
Cable	12M	= (12,000K)

From the above data it would appear that EVDO is what you want, but it's not quite that simple (it never is).

EVDO is mostly available in large metropolitan areas, and then not necessarily everywhere within the city limits. If you have wireless broadband with a carrier that uses EVDO, it will drop to either EDGE or 3G if EVDO is not available.

If you are considering wireless broadband be sure to find out what type of broadband they provide and how extensive their coverage is.

There are 2 items of good news on the horizon, re wireless broadband.

1. Several wireless broadband providers are talking about subsidizing the cost of a netbook with a subscription to their service, much as cell phone providers do with cell phones. Since the wireless broadband adapters are USB (or cardbus) adapters, you should be able to use the wireless

broadband on either the network or a different notebook computer.

2. There is a new wireless broadband technology expected to come out next year. It is named LTE and uses **4G** technology (which is not currently available).

MICROSOFT GOES BING

The war for search engines continues. First, there was Google Desktop being pushed onto your computer whenever you didn't read the fine print. Now it's Bing and Ask.

Bing is a reworked version of the Windows Live Search and according to published reports it shows a lot of promise. I've tried it a few times and find the results are pretty good.

Ask is the current name of the old **Ask Jeeves** search engine, and seems to be everywhere. No matter what I do, there is a program that tries to make **Ask** my default search engine and also my browser's home page. **I find this very annoying.** If I want one of these tools, I'll get it – don't sneak it onto my computer when I'm not looking.

This is not to say that Bing and Ask are bad tools. Each uses different algorithms for their searches and produces different results, so each might be better with any given search. But if you want to use them, just go to their website and use it.

BE S.M.A.R.T.

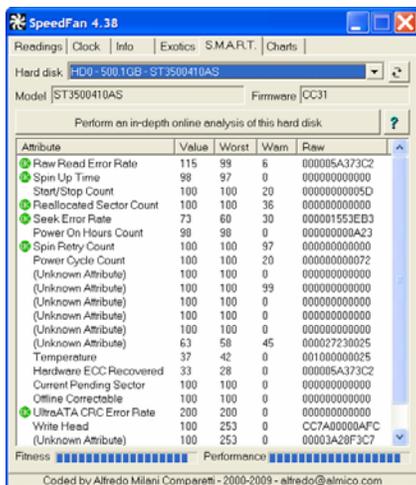
No, not Get Smart...be S.M.A.R.T.

S.M.A.R.T. stands for Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology and is designed into most newer motherboards. If your computer is less than about 3 years old, it probably has S.M.A.R.T.

What S.M.A.R.T. does is monitor how your hard drive reads and writes data. There are always some errors requiring repeats of reads and writes and S.M.A.R.T. keeps score. If the number of errors goes up past a certain point, the drive may be failing and might need replacement.

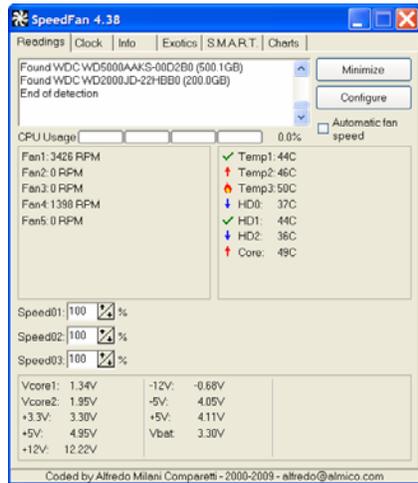
There are at two programs that I can recommend to check your S.M.A.R.T.

Speedfan is one that I use frequently. While Speedfan is primarily designed to monitor the fans and temperatures in your computer, it also displays your current S.M.A.R.T. status. When you start Speedfan, there will be 5 tabs at the top. Click the S.M.A.R.T. tab and your status will be displayed.



Note that the drive's Fitness and Performance are rated at the bottom. If you click the little button at the right of the wide blue bar just below the tabs, you can select which hard drive you want to monitor, if you have more than one.

While I'm on the topic of Speedfan, it's really designed to monitor fans and temperatures. A screenshot of the **Reading** tab is displayed at the top of the next column. As you can see, this particular display indicates that high temperatures in red, low temperatures in blue, and temps that fall within normal operating limits in green. It also displays the speeds of fans in your computer. Go to <http://www.almico.com/sfdownload.php> to download this **FREE** program.



Another free program is **HDD Health** which you can download from www.panterasoft.com. HDD Health operates a bit differently from Speedfan, as it is intended to monitor hard drives rather than temperatures. However, HDD Health can be set to alert you of a possibly impending drive failure by displaying a message or even by emailing you.

DECRAPIFY YOUR COMPUTER

Most new computers include a plethora of trial programs that you will never use, or if you do use them you will wind up paying full price for. The computer manufacturer gets money from Microsoft, Symantec, McAfee, and many other companies for putting their trial versions on your new computer. These "bundled" programs are often referred to as **shovelware** or **crapware**. Testing has shown that removing these programs can improve your computer's performance by as much as 10%.

If you use the trial versions of Office, or an Antivirus program, etc., and decide to buy the program, you will pay full price for it. In that case, I recommend that you shop around and find the same program at a Staples, Costco, OfficeMax, or other nearby store, or on the internet, for a substantial discount.

Be sure to get rid of all of the shovelware on your new computer (or even your older computer). The easy way is a free program named **PC Decrapifier**. This program looks for the most common shovelware on your

computer and you can select which to keep or toss. It then uninstalls those that you select all at once. Pretty nice. I tend to run PC Decrapifier whenever I set up a new computer. You can get this **free download** from www.pcdecrapifier.com

Get it and say good riddance to garbage on your computer.

CONVERT PDFs TO WORD

Saving a Word file, or for that matter anything that you can print, to a .pdf file is easy. Just use PDF Creator or any of a number of other free (or not free) PDF creation programs. But have you ever tried to get text off of a .pdf file so that you can edit it in Word? Aaaarrrrrrggghhhhh!

Well, you can do it now, and for free by going to www.pdfword.com. In the pdfword web page, browse to find the .pdf file you want to convert, and then click the CONVERT button. The converted document will be emailed to you in a few minutes.

My experiments with documents that are all print, with no graphics, turn out pretty good. With documents that have graphics, the results don't look exactly like the .pdf file, but the text seems to be all there and can be edited, or copied & pasted. Not perfect, but it sure does save a lot of typing.

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