

Likely culprits to check when wireless connection crawls

August 14 2009, By Anne Krishnan

Q: I have a problem with our Dell laptop computer's wireless connection using Internet Explorer. At various times, the speed drops down to sloth and then stops altogether. At the same time, other computers, a desktop connected directly to the router and another laptop which is connected through the wireless connection both function. When the Dell is taken to another wireless site location, it works.

At this point I don't have a clue as to what to do. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

A. I receive questions like this every so often, and I posed several to Dianne Dunlap, a customer support engineer specializing in [wireless technology](#) for [Cisco Systems](#).

When you're talking about home PCs and users, nearly anything can be causing this kind of issue, she said. She provided a thorough breakdown of solutions to address possible problems with the wireless card and [network](#). I'll explore her suggestions in this column and the next.

- If the problem is with the wireless card (also known as a network interface card, or NIC), the first thing to check is that the card's drivers are current, Dunlap said.

The existing drivers can be determined by going to "Start," then "Control Panel," "System," the "Hardware" tab and "Device Manager." Look under "Network Adapters" to find your wireless card, then click on the

card and select "Properties" under the "Action" menu at the top of the screen. Click on the "Driver" tab to see the driver date and NIC vendor/model.

Unless the drivers are extremely current, you should go to the card vendor's Web site, locate current drivers for the card, and download/update the drivers, Dunlap said. You might also want to check the "Power Management" tab on the menu above to see if the card supports "power save." While saving power is a good idea, if a card goes into power save but does not wake up afterwards, the setting is ill-advised.

- If you're using Microsoft to configure the card, you also should be sure that the service packs and system patches on your XP or Windows Vista operating system are up to date. That means Service Pack 3 for XP and Service Pack 1 for Vista.
- The wireless card vendor often will have a management utility that can be used instead of the Microsoft utility to set up connection parameters for the card. One may work better than the other, so Dunlap suggests checking to see if the vendor has its own management utility when you're looking for the most up-to-date drivers.
- You might also want to be sure that unused adapters in the PC, such as any wired Ethernet adapters, are disabled. Check it out by going to "Control Panel," then "Network Connections."
- If you are using the Microsoft utility (also known as "Wireless-0") to manage the card, you can see if the card has obtained the IP address that's necessary for communicating with the network by selecting the "Control Panel" and "Network Connections," then choosing your card and clicking on the "Support" tab.

The card and its default gateway should both have addresses other than 0.0.0.0 or 169.##.##, Dunlap said.

If there are other PCs on the local network, the default gateway for all PCs should be the same, and each PC's IP address, while unique, should share the first three sets of numbers to signify they're on the same network. If there's a problem with the IP addresses, try resetting them with the "repair connection" button on that screen.

(Think you can stump the geeks? Send your high-tech question to stumpthegeeks@newsobserver.com. Please include your name, address and daytime phone number. Individual replies are not given.)

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