New Wi-Fi technology to let gadgets talk directly

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(AP) -- Starting in mid-2010, new versions of gadgets like cameras, cell phones and computers will be able to talk to each other using Wi-Fi without needing to connect to a wireless network first.

The Wi-Fi Alliance, an industry group, said Wednesday it is nearly finished putting together a Wi-Fi Direct specification, a set of technical "rules" that guide consumer electronics companies that plan to add the new capability.

Kelly Davis-Felner, the Wi-Fi Alliance's marketing director, said Wi-Fi Direct will make it easier to liberate the mounting gigabytes of digital family photos that are trapped in cameras, smart phones or PCs. Now those gadgets will be able to connect directly to digital photo frames, TVs or printers.

In creating the specification, the Alliance is moving into the territory of Bluetooth, a competing wireless technology that already handles direct gadget-to-gadget connections. Bluetooth uses less power but has much shorter range and a lower transfer speed. To tackle the latter problem, the industry group behind Bluetooth announced last year that it would co-opt Wi-Fi technology to make it possible to send videos and other bandwidth-hogging files around the house, much as Wi-Fi Direct promises to do.

Only one of the gadgets need have the new Wi-Fi Direct technology to make a two-way connection work. In one scenario, you could connect a

smart phone with Wi-Fi Direct to a laptop and piggyback on its wired Internet connection for a quick e-mail check without tapping your phone's data plan.