



Keeping in touch

It's not hard to remain plugged in while traveling if you plan ahead / **Simson L. Garfinkel**

PARIS - WHILE IT'S true that the Internet is great for keeping in touch with people around the world, I've found it equally useful for keeping in touch with my editors and those left at home while I do the traveling.

Indeed, in recent months I've visited Japan, Poland, and France - all without so much as a day's interruption to the frenetic pace of my electronic correspondence.

Some people may think that it's a shame to travel to the Triamca Palace (now a Westin Hotel), only to hunt down a phone jack and plug-in.

But in fact the electronic leash that is my laptop and the global

When I travel to a new area, I first check the IBM Web site and print out every telephone access number in the country.

I also print out my user name, my password (which I never can remember), and the addresses for all of IBM's Internet services (mail, POP, name service, and so on).

Understand that I don't use IBM as my primary ISP - I actually access the Internet through a MediaOne cable modem in Cambridge and through a local ISP on the Vineyard.

But when I travel, I use IBM's global network to access my existing Internet accounts.

■ Carry a plug adapter, not a voltage adapter. Electricity in the US runs at 110V, Europe runs at 220V, and Japan runs at 100V. A few years ago converting between these meant carrying bulky transformers. Fortunately, modern computers (and almost all laptops) have switching power supplies that can automatically adapt to any voltage between 100V and 240V, and at either 60Hz (US) or 50Hz (Europe).

But if you want to plug your power supply into the wall, you'll need an adapter to convert from the US standard socket to the two-prong standard in Europe.

Buy this adapter in the US and it will cost you less than \$8. Overseas, I've seen them for as much as \$15.

Besides the adapter, I've found it handy to travel with a lightweight extension cord and a small power strip. A surprising number of hotels have just a single outlet in each room. It's there

for the vacuum cleaner!

■ Carry a telephone adapter. Although most hotels that I've stayed in have the same modular RJ-11 jacks that we have in the United States, older hotels, offices, and most private homes don't.

France is especially bad on this score. I've managed to avoid the adapter problem by picking up a universal telephone converter kit (cost: \$25), which lets me plug an RJ-11 cord into the French, English, German, and Italian standards.

For emergency situations I also carry a screwdriver and my own RJ-11 plug.

Besides the plugs, it's a good idea to carry an extra telephone cord as well. This past trip to Grenoble the hotel staff yanked my phone cord out of the wall - and broke the RJ-11 plug in the process.

If I hadn't been carrying a spare, you wouldn't be reading this column.

■ Know your software, especially the Windows dialer. To get phone calls through in recent months I've had to tail my computer to dial without listening for dial tone and to dial with pulse instead of touch-tone. Spend the time to learn your software - before going on that big trip, when you can still call tech support (or your guru) without having it be an expensive international call.

■ Carry extra software. When I'm going to be out of the country for more than a few days, I carry CD-ROMs with copies of Windows 95, Office 97, and sometimes Norton Utilities.

After all, you never know when you are going to have to reinstall something, and it's really hard to find a decent computer store when you don't speak the local language.

■ Carry extra batteries. Since you never know when you're going to be able to plug in (especially in some airports), I find that it's better to pack at least 12 hours of power at the start of every trip.

With my Sony PCC-717 laptop, that translates to 4 batteries. Cost: \$250 a piece!

If you are in the market for a new laptop, be sure that you find one that is durable and light.

For extended travel, I prefer built-in modems to those on PCMCIA cards - they tend to be more reliable over time, and there is no floppy socket to break or external cord to lose.

Once you start traveling with your laptop, you're likely to find all sorts of problems with it that the designers never envisioned. For example, after traveling with my Sony for a month, I noticed that it was occasionally crashing for no apparent reason.

I finally traced the problem to a tiny speck that appeared every time I slid the laptop out of my backpack's nylon sleeve.

I've told Sony about the problem, which I have also seen on my PCC-706, but Sony's engineers didn't believe me.

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