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Socket Tech Talk 61

Traveling safely with a computer

In 2009, 2.6 million laptops were stolen worldwide according to Safeware Insurance Agency, a leading computer insurance company. Vacations and visiting loved ones is a fun way to spend the summer months, and taking a laptop computer along can be a great way to stay connected while you are away. However, traveling with electronics presents an increased risk of theft and damage.

To avoid replacing or repairing a very expensive piece of equipment, follow these tips:

Avoid leaving your computer in extreme heat. Laptops frequently have heating issues even when running in normal climates. However, high air temperatures can be even more disastrous. Excessive heat can cause a computer's inner workings to burn out, among other problems.

"All computers will have problems if their internal temperature reaches a high enough point," said Corey Wyatt, a technical support agent at Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet provider. "At that point, circuits can start to burn out. Sometimes you can even see the physical damage."

Don't leave a laptop in a hot car, especially for long periods of time, and be sure vents are not blocked while in use. When in a car or hotel room, consider a stand or cooling pad to open air flow at the bottom of the computer, where vents are usually located.

Never fly with a laptop in checked baggage. Airlines do not treat baggage as fragile. Most airlines will allow a carry-on bag and one personal item such as a laptop bag, briefcase or purse.

Airport security may want to check that your laptop is a working computer, so be sure the battery has remaining power when passing through checkpoints. Once on the plane, store your laptop under your seat instead of in the overhead compartment.

Use public Wi-Fi wisely. There are numerous places to connect to free wireless Internet while traveling: the airport, coffee shops, cafes and even truck

stops. This makes staying connected a breeze, but be careful with what information is entered on an unsecure Internet connection.

"Avoid entering credit card or other financial information, and always look for a padlock symbol on websites to indicate they are secure," says Wyatt. "Update your computer's anti-virus software before a trip to prevent hackers from accessing your computer on an unsecure wireless network."

Always keep your computer close. Laptop computers are extremely convenient and useful, but also easy to steal. Keep a close eye on it when in public places and never leave it unattended, not even for something as simple as a bathroom break.

While traveling, do not leave a laptop out in a highly visible place in a hotel room. It is less likely for hotel staff to steal from a guest, but it is not unheard of. Simply remove the temptation by putting it away while not in the room.

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Trips can be a lot of fun, but traveling comes with its risks. Stay safe and prevent added expenses by following these tips. For more info about traveling safely with your computer, visit www.socket.net/traveltips for a full list of tips and suggestions.

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