

# Internet by Satellite

“Grrrr! Where can I connect to the Internet today? My credit card payments are going to be late...it takes forever to download those photos...I can't update my software...I need to keep up-to-date on my investments. My whole day is spent finding a fast connection to the Internet! *There has to be a better way*”

Tired of lugging your laptop to a dial-up connection, driving to a cellphone zone, or hunting down a local wireless connection? Internet by satellite may be your solution.

The biggest advantage to satellite technology is having total control over your Internet access. If you have an open Southeastern sky, you can be online anytime, anywhere. Whether in an RV park or boondocking, you have access anywhere in the USA , and even possibly Southern Canada and Northern Mexico.

The basic service speed is about 13 times faster than dial-up, or about the same as rural DSL, but generally slower than a cable connection like you might have at home. The cost of the Internet service starts at \$60 per month with HughesNet as the Internet provider (one of only two providers for portable/mobile Internet systems) and includes 5 E-mail addresses. Faster speeds are available at a higher monthly service cost, but most RVers find the basic level service works just fine.

Any PC running Windows™ 98 SE or later can be used with satellite access, but Win2000 or XP is recommended. Any Linux computer or Macintosh® with 10.1 OS or later works well too. Internet by satellite is computer independent.

The satellite modem included in your hardware purchase contains all the software. No pointing software is loaded on your hard drive. An Ethernet (CAT5) cable connects your computer to the modem. If you have an older computer that does not have a built-in Ethernet port, you can purchase a USB-to-Ethernet adapter at your local office supply store.

Satisfaction with your satellite equipment definitely depends on the design of the portable or mobile system you purchase. Do your homework by using Google to search (“portable satellite Internet”) to find the different products available.

**Portable Satellite Internet:** If you are in the market for a manually-pointed, portable tripod-based Internet system, look for tool-free equipment setup with quality components (preferably without expensive and complicated signal finders), step-by-step documentation for setup and troubleshooting, plus reliable on-the-road telephone support.

The price range for a tripod-based system is \$1100 to \$2900.

The practicality of the tripod-based portable Internet system is obvious. Your parking space is not tied to your Internet access because you can move the dish 100 feet or more if you need to poke between trees to find the satellite. A tripod-based system also uses much less electricity while docking in the boonies. Another big plus is that you can use your portable system at home when you are not traveling and replace your slow dial-up connection.

Average setup time for a well designed portable system is about 15 minutes.



Tripod-based Satellite Internet System

**Mobile Satellite Internet:** Automatic pointing roof-mounted systems also come in a few flavors. Look for a reputable dealer that offers telephone support at no additional charge (hopefully, based in the USA). Do not buy on price alone, however, because support is very important. Ask about maintenance support too. Replacement parts for these systems are very expensive.

The price range on automatic rooftop systems is \$4500 to \$6500 plus about \$1000 for installation (it takes about 12 hours to install it properly). If you are buying a new RV, you could have the rooftop version installed by the dealer and save you the downtime.

The beauty of the rooftop automatic is that you can roll into a rest stop, download your E-mail, and be back on the road in 30 minutes. The obvious downside to any rooftop version is that the signal can be blocked by overhead trees requiring you to park in the open, winter or summer. And, of course, the cost is three times more than the tripod equipment.



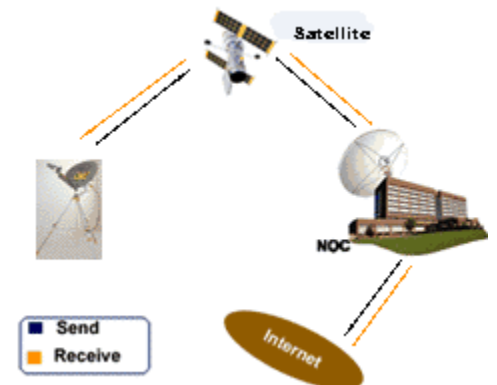
Rooftop-mounted Satellite Internet System

**How It Works:** *Using a tripod-based system*, the satellite modem connects to your computer via an Ethernet cable and provides you with the coordinates (azimuth, elevation, skew) to manually point the satellite dish so that it aligns with the orbiting satellite. The pointing software contained in the modem is simple to use. A few clicks of the mouse (or touchpad) and you are online.

*Using a rooftop automatic system*, the push of a button starts the controller connected to the satellite modem and attached to your computer via Ethernet. The dish unfolds and scans the sky for the proper satellite, aligns the signal, and you are online.

Both types of satellite Internet systems perform exactly the same after locking to the satellite. Web browsers recommended are Internet Explorer 6 or Firefox 2 and are used as an interface to the modem. Only an open sky to the southeast is required. No telephone connection or special skill is necessary.

As an example, let's visit <http://www.escapees.com>. After typing the website address into your web browser, the request is relayed through the satellite modem, and bounces from your satellite dish (groundstation) to the orbiting satellite, back down to the Network Operation Center of the Internet provider and out to the Internet. The cycle is completed when the signal returns to you and displays your Internet request (Escapees.com) on your computer.



So, if Internet access is important to you wherever you roam, satellite technology provides the best solution. If you are traveling full time in your RV as we are, it's the only answer because, as you fulltimers know, flexibility is the key. We love adventure and the freedom to go wherever the inner voice calls. We want to take the Internet with us.

*Margo Armstrong is a certified PC/Network technician and co-owner of Maxwell Satellite. She also writes satellite, Internet and PC technical articles for the Escapee Magazine, Trailer Life, and RVing Women. Margo has been a fulltime RVer for 12 years and connects to the Internet using a [Maxwell Satellite](#) portable satellite system.*