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Tales From Wireless Road Warriors

Loaded with gadgets and technical savvy, three corporate users share their strategies for staying connected in a sometimes fractured wireless world.

News Story by Bob Brewin

MAY 17, 2004 ([COMPUTERWORLD](#)) - At first glance, those road warriors who slow airport security lines while they fill up plastic bins with cell phones, PDAs, e-mail pagers and Wi-Fi-equipped laptops look like hopeless geeks who just can't resist the latest mobile toy.

But according to enterprise users whose work depends on wireless technology, it takes multiple devices operating on multiple networks to ensure a connection. That's true now and will be for the foreseeable future, they say.

That's because no U.S. cellular carrier provides truly nationwide coverage; one carrier usually provides better coverage in certain areas than the others do. And some U.S. cell phones and data cards don't work at all overseas because of incompatible standards, which means global workers have to tote additional gear.

Computerworld talked with three business executives who have overcome these wireless challenges through a combination of technical savvy and diligence. Here's a look at the lengths they go to in order to stay connected.

Road Warrior: Louis Rosenthal, executive vice president, ABN Amro Holding NV

Where He Roams: He regularly travels between offices in New York and Chicago; he also visits ABN Amro's Amsterdam headquarters.

Rosenthal packs a cellular laptop data card from Sprint PCS Group and another card that hooks him into the data network of Bedminster, N.J.-based Verizon Wireless, both of which run their networks on the CDMA standard used primarily in the U.S.

Both cards provide between 50K and 70Kbit/sec. throughput, and when



Louis Rosenthal,
executive vice
president at ABN Amro
Holding NV

Rosenthal, who manages ABN Amro's technology infrastructure, can't get a signal from one carrier, he pulls out one card and pops in the other.

For e-mail, Rosenthal travels with a BlackBerry device [QuickLink [a4520](#)] from Research In Motion Ltd. in Waterloo, Ontario, that operates on the Global System for Mobile Communications standard, which assures him of coverage overseas and over a GSM network in the U.S. operated by AT&T Wireless Services Inc. in Redmond, Wash. Rosenthal says he also packs a GSM cell phone that provides him with global voice coverage.

He travels with a high-speed (11Mbit/sec.) Wi-Fi laptop data card and looks for free access wherever he goes -- especially in Europe, where paid Wi-Fi access can run as high as \$80 per day. He has also blanketed his home with Wi-Fi and installed a high-gain antenna so he can use his Wi-Fi laptop on his boat, which is docked at the edge of his property.

All these devices are necessary in an imperfect wireless world, Rosenthal says. "I'm out of the office virtually all the time, and not every carrier has service where you need it," he says. "I have to make sure I can get connected."

Road Warrior: Carl Oppedahl, patent attorney, Oppedahl & Larson LLP, Dillon, Colo.

Where He Roams: He travels worldwide on trips that are completely dictated by client needs.

Like Rosenthal, Oppedahl travels with two cellular data cards, one for the Sprint PCS network and another that hooks him into the 100K to 130Kbit/sec. Enhanced Data Rates for Global Evolution (EDGE) service that AT&T Wireless offers nationwide. But Oppedahl says he has found EDGE service unavailable even at major hub airports, and he sometimes has to replace the EDGE card with the Sprint card to tap into e-mail from his laptop.

His e-mail connections are critical, Oppedahl says, because he has all his office voice messages forwarded to him as .wav files and all office faxes forwarded as TIFF files. Oppedahl travels with a Wi-Fi router from SMC Networks Inc. in Irvine, Calif., that doubles as a print server. When he arrives at a hotel, Oppedahl says, he plugs the router into an Ethernet jack and uses it to send faxes and other documents to a portable printer.

Oppedahl uses a GSM cell phone from AT&T Wireless for overseas trips. He estimates his monthly airtime bill at \$280: \$80 each for data service from two carriers and \$120 for the GSM phone. But the cost is worth it, he says, because "connectivity is critical to me. I have to respond to my clients no matter where I am. I have no option but to carry all these things."



Carl Oppedahl, patent attorney at Oppedahl & Larson LLP

Road Warrior: Dave Mathews, director of product innovation, RadioShack Corp., Fort Worth, Texas

Where He Roams: The majority of his travel is domestic, primarily to the East Coast, but also to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. His overseas trips are mainly to Munich, Paris and Zurich.

Mathews has his phone calls forwarded to him via voice-over-IP (VoIP) service from Vonage Holdings Corp. in Edison, N.J., that's installed at his home. If he's hooked up to a Wi-Fi network, Mathews says, he can answer those calls through softphone software he has installed on his laptop and PDA.

If he doesn't answer, the call is sent as a .wav file to his [Sidekick smart phone](#), which runs on the GPRS network of T-Mobile USA Inc. in Redmond, Wash. Sidekick also has a full keyboard, so he can use it to send and receive e-mails and receive faxes as TIFF files.

To make voice calls on the road, Mathews uses a Sprint cell phone with voice-activated dialing. He says he doubts that mobile workers will ever be free of device clutter, not because of technology but because of ergonomics. People don't want to hold smart phones to their heads to make calls, he says, and regular cell phones are poor data input devices because their keypads and screens are small.

Being a pioneer has its drawbacks. Mathews says his wife doesn't like having to first dial 9 to make a call from home, and his neighbors don't understand why his home phone number has a different area code from theirs. Both anomalies are caused by quirks in the VoIP system.



Dave Mathews, director of product