

Get a Dial-Up Connection When Disaster Strikes

By Bruce Gain, PCWorld and USRobotics

The Internet blackout in Egypt serves as an excellent case study for the kind of disaster any IT department should be ready to face. Backup systems must be in place for the day when servers crash, a fire wipes out a server room, an earthquake destroys the entire business site, or in the case of Egypt, the government decides to shut down the Internet. But what about the road warrior?

Suppose you were (or still are) in Egypt and you need to communicate what is taking place to the rest of the world, or just want to check in with the office? One solution is slow yet often reliable dial-up Internet connectivity.

It also does not take a government Internet blackout or a major disaster to create the need for a dial-up connection. How often have you ever been in a hotel room with spotty Wi-Fi access and no Ethernet port? In the office, DSL and cable broadband access from major carriers do go down sometimes as well (although larger firms should have Internet provider backup options available, but many SOHOs will likely not have the resources to do that). Then there are electricity brown-outs, and for SOHOs without any backup power generators, broadband will not work.

Access to a landline phone, a modem, and a dial-up-Internet ISP account is all you need to get back online in all of the scenarios described above. When there is an electricity outage, for example, the telephone lines usually still work, thus making a dial-up connection possible.

Without touting the merits of any one product or ISP service, here are some dial-up alternatives. It's still possible to buy laptops with internal dial-up modems, although the feature has become less common following the proliferation of broadband access. HP says it still offers internal modems for its business customers, for example, for when broadband access is unavailable or in the event of a disaster.

For PCs without an internal dial-up modem, USRobotics offers several external devices, such as the USRobotics Courier 56K Business Serial Modem and the 56K USB Controller Modem. According to the company, the Courier 56K offers features such as automatic redialing in case signals are dropped and remote diagnostic capabilities for remote troubleshooting and management.



USR3453C
USRobotics Courier
56K Business Modem

When traveling abroad, you must remember to bring the right power adapter for different electrical outlets in various countries around the world for your laptop as well as a serial external modem. To that end, USRobotics Courier 56K Business Modem comes with 110V-to-240V power supplies with different adapters. USB modems do not require power adapters and are powered by the laptop or computer it is connected to, making it ideal for traveling.



USR5637
Controller USB Modem

Dial-up connections require servers, which some ISPs provide. Among the major carriers, Verizon offers the service while Cox Communications does not. Other dial-up Internet providers include EarthLink, NetZero, and PeoplePC. While there are usually ways around it, many business users who do not have the patience to hack their systems can rely on the software the service provider offers when connecting with a Windows, Mac, or Linux operating system.

However, one thing to keep in mind is that users are charged phone rates. Dialing up a server in California from a hotel in Egypt is likely a costly proposition.

Graphic: Diego Aguirre The alternatives described above should enable any business user to establish an Internet link from Egypt, although this writer has not yet tested them. However, French service provider FDN claims it has successfully offered Internet access to users in Egypt through a dial-up connection to its servers in France.

The data transfer speeds of 56 kilobits-per-second (Kbps) that dial-up connections offer are hardly any match for a 4 megabits-per-second (Mbps) broadband connection, of course, and thus are painstakingly slow for bandwidth-intensive applications such as Youtube. However, for Twitter, Facebook, Google, or e-mail access when disaster strikes or broadband is unavailable, a dial-up connection can get the job done.

