

Intro to Wi-Fi Networking Using Windows Vista

One of the numerous changes and enhancements in Windows Vista is the range of networking features. Microsoft tried to increase networking performance and security, though users will have to get used to a new look and interface. Therefore, this series of tutorials will introduce you to some of the enhancements and changes in Windows Vista involving networking, compared to its predecessor, Windows XP, and will show you how to perform common networking configuration tasks.

Network and Sharing Center

The new Network and Sharing Center (below) provides a one-stop shop for all your networking and Internet configuration needs.



You can access the Network and Sharing Center via many methods:

- Right-click on the network status icon in the system tray.
- Double-click on the network status icon in the system tray.
- Double-click on the Network and Sharing Center icon in the Control Panel.
- Click on the Network and Sharing Center button on the tool bar when viewing your Network.

As you can see, this center provides visual maps of your home or office network. The full map that's accessible from this center provides an easy way to access any shared resources of other PCs and devices on the network.

Just below the network map on the Network and Sharing Center, you can view and access your connection information. The Customize link allows you to change the name of the network connection, the type (private or public), and the icon given to the network connection, such as the briefcase you see in figure 1.

Next, you're provided with the status of all the main sharing and discovery settings and the ability to make quick changes, which is a big enhancement from XP.

Another exceptional improvement is the set of links on the bottom of the window, showing you all the files and folders your account and computer are sharing on the network.

The integrated task pane on the left side of the window provides access to familiar connectivity settings and tasks, as well as a shortcut to the Internet Options and Wireless Firewall settings.

New Network Classification Scheme

In Windows Vista, the first time you connect to a network, you must classify its location/type: Home, Work, or Public.

Here's the window that pops up after you connect to a new network:



This new feature is extremely useful as it automatically modifies the appropriate network settings based upon the location type you choose. For example, say you connect to the Wi-Fi hotspot at your local café; you would choose Public location. Then Vista will automatically

disable all network discovery and sharing to protect your documents and privacy while on the unsecured network. Then, say you went back home and connected to your home network, naturally classified as a Home location. Windows Vista then would allow network discovery and sharing, because you trust the other users on the network.

Support for Non-Broadcasting Wireless Networks

Windows Vista makes it easier to use wireless networks that do not broadcast their SSID ([define](#)) (also known as the network name). In Windows XP, these types of networks didn't appear on the list of available wireless networks; however, they now appear as unnamed networks in Windows Vista.

Instead of having to manually add a non-broadcasting wireless network to the preferred network list in order to connect, all you have to do in Vista is select the Unnamed Network, click Connect, and when prompted, enter the SSID.

You may think that this degrades the security that hidden networks offer; however, the SSID is still needed in order to connect to the network. Additionally, not broadcasting your SSID doesn't offer a whole lot of security anyway, a fact that I've discussed [before](#).

Where's My Network Places?

The My Network Places feature that has been in previous versions of Windows has simply been renamed to Network in Vista. You can access the Network on Vista's start menu or when viewing your computer contents in Windows Explorer. Furthermore, for even quicker access, you can add the Network icon to your desktop:

1. Right-click on your desktop and select **Personalize**.
2. Click the **Change desktop icons** link, on the left in the integrated task pane.
3. Check the icons you wish to appear on the desktop, then click **OK** to exit.