

Computer Corner

By Jim Jeup
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Question:

Sometimes the internet is fast, and sometimes it is very slow, why? - Denise

Denise,

The internet is not fast or slow, but constant much like a real highway. There are times when traffic is heavy, creating traffic standstills. As traffic thins, you begin moving again. The **Information Highway** (internet) displays similar traffic patterns during heavy traffic times. To help you understand this, let us take a trip on the **I-way** to see why it seems fast or slow.

Getting to the I-way

Like a highway, our I-way experience depends on cars, roads and the view. Our computer is our car, our internet service provider (**ISP**) determines how many lanes the roads have, and our web browser provides the view. Everyone says, "Faster is better" where computers are concerned. However, what good is a fast car in heavy traffic? On the I-way, roads are the key to a successful experience. If our ISP supplies a **broadband modem** (network connection like Bright House), that's equivalent to having 32-lane roads with 16-lane on-ramps. If we use a **dial-up modem** (phone lines like Juno), that's equivalent to 2-lane roads with a 1-lane on-ramp. Now, what happens when we try to enter the I-way?

Entering the I-way

An on-ramp is the only way to enter the I-way, and everyone's internet on-ramp is a **router**. Routers are machines that literally route traffic onto the I-way. If one ISP router is down due to construction or accident, we are detoured to another router just like highway on-ramps. Now that we are on the I-way, let us continue our trip.

**Important to remember – traffic for a downed router is detoured to one that already has traffic. Therefore, if we use dialup during rush hour on the internet, we will probably run into traffic standstills. And, if a router is down, we have time to catch up on computer maintenance, or say hello to immediate family members we haven't seen since the day we plugged in our computer.

A trip on the I-way

Like a real highway, the I-way connects to other I-ways (networks), cities (servers) and locations (web sites), there are more lanes in some areas (larger connections), other areas are under construction (networks, servers or web sites), and there are accidents (outages). Our viewer shows us the problems in cryptic form such as; 404, 500 or 'website cannot be found' errors. In addition, like a real highway, when we come to a standstill, it does not always mean our car broke down. Sometimes the I-way has its own problems.

Safe at home

It would take an entire library section (and does) to explain everything about the internet. However, I wanted to give you basic internet understanding. For a better understanding of how things work, try this web site: www.howstuffworks.com

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