If You Cannot Connect to the Internet (Troubleshooting) 1/29/18

If your ability to connect to the Internet has been lost, here are several things to try before you call Cox, Century Link or anyone else. I'm assuming, of course, that you have paid your bill and you are supposed to have service. Symptoms of not being connected can show as no email being received or a browser showing a white page that says "cannot display the web page" or a message balloon that says connection lost.

First of all, it is highly **UN**likely that the Cox or Century Link (CL) Service is really down and since calling them involves navigating a lengthy automated menu, I would only call them as a last resort. The first thing to do is to look at your modem. This is the box that is connected to the wire that comes right out of the wall. You need to check the status of the lights. With Cox the light labeled "online" or "cable", depending on the modem brand, should be on without blinking. With a CL box the light labeled "Internet" should be on steadily. If this is not the case, you need to "power cycle" your modem, which is done by turning it off (pulling the power wire out of the back), waiting at least 15 seconds and then plugging it back in. Wait for the lights to settle down.

If you are using a router to split the Internet signal or to make your house wireless, you must power cycle the router **AFTER** you cycle the modem. The sequence is extremely important. On the router, there will be a light showing the presence of the Internet (might be a lower case "i" or a small "globe") that should be glowing green. Routers vary in their design, but there will be a light indicating the Internet is there. After that it may be necessary to reboot your computer. Many users now have a modem/router in the same box. Restarting this handles the whole thing.

If you still have no Internet you must determine if you are wired or wireless. If wired, make sure the wire, usually a Category Five (Cat 5, sometimes called an Ethernet wire) is connected securely to both the router and the computer. Also it is possible the wire in the router is in the wrong jack. Check jacks for labels.

If you are wireless, make sure the switch is ON that has your computer seeking a wireless signal. In Windows 10 there is WiFi button that appears on the screen when you left click the information icon in the lower right corner of the screen. This button should be blue. If it's a laptop, make sure you are not in airplane mode. Prior to Windows 10 the WiFi enable switch can be a physical switch that is often on the edge of a laptop or it can be a "function" switch that is controlled by a keyboard key. If you can't find a switch, there is always the possibility that your laptop is too old to be wireless. Older desktops (three or more years - before Windows 10), as a rule, are not automatically wireless. They can be made so by installing a PCI card for that function or buying and installing a USB wireless adapter – sometimes called an access point.

If you mean to be wireless and the switch is ON, now you have to find the network name (SSID) that you want to connect to. In the lower right corner of the screen near the clock, there will be a small signal strength indicator. Click it and choose the wireless network from the list. A Web Key may be requested if it's a secure network.

If it can't connect or shows "local only", recycle the modem and router again. Or it may say "Connected, no Internet Access." This means the machine has a router connection but the router doesn't have the Internet to send to the computer. Recycle modem and router.

Here is another possible cause for dropping wireless connection. It is possible that the signal strength is not strong enough to maintain a connection. This can happen if you are too far from the router or there are too many obstructions – like exterior walls, desks or appliances in the way. If signal strength is low, play with the location of the router. If you are normally connected wirelessly and the signal strength is good, yet the connection drops frequently, it is very possible that the "firmware" (a program inside the router) is in need of an upgrade. Type into Google "upgrade firmware 'brand name'" (without the quote marks) where brand name is the brand of your router… could be Linksys, Netgear, Belkin, Airlink or D-Link. It will give you directions.

Another possible cause of Internet-connection loss could be a class of Virus called a Rogue. Viruses of this ilk get around many normal virus checkers and can throw a switch that prevents Internet connection. In addition to throwing this switch, however, there are usually other messages (that may appear somewhat legitimate) telling you that your computer is infected and trying to sell you some worthless software. Don't buy the software. You should also do the following: Open Control Panel, Choose Internet Options, Choose the Connections Tab, then pick LAN setting in the lower right. On the next window there should NOT be a check next to "Use a proxy server for your LAN". If there IS a check there, you likely have a Rogue (this is only one possible symptom). Remove the check and click OK. Then run Malwarebytes. If it doesn't run, boot into Safe Mode and try it again.

Finally, there is always a chance of a hardware failure – Modem, router or computer circuit board. This is the least likely of the possible causes of lost Internet, but it can't totally be ruled out. To verify a failed modem you will need to talk to Cox or CL, but don't call them until you have exhausted the other things described above.

Although a dialup connection to Internet was common in the early to mid nineties (That's an eternity ago in computer time), it has been almost completely replaced by a Cable or DSL connection. DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) available locally from Century Link goes up to 12 to 15 Mbps (when "b" is written in lower case it means Mega BITS per second (Mbps); when shown as MBps it usually means Mega Bytes per second). It shares your phone line (multiplexing) and, therefore, does not make it busy. Still better is a cable connection, available through Cox locally, and depending on the speed ordered, can be up to 75 mbps. Pricing for DSL is about $30 per month and Cable $35 to $75 depending on the speed ordered. Sales and specials always seem to be available, so pricing can vary. Yet another option for high-speed connection is through a cell provider like Verizon using what is called a "hot spot". This is often the most expensive but gives the most flexibility. This can be used anywhere - even in a moving vehicle. A cell phone hotspot is usually slower than DSL or Cable and counts against "measured data".

A public hot spot is a place where wireless, high-speed Internet is available (sometimes for free). Around here, hot spots include Sky Harbor Airport, Starbucks, McDonalds, Barnes and Noble, the PebbleCreek Clubhouses and most Hotels and Motels. The wireless connections can be unsecured (meaning you can connect without a WiFi password) or secured. Hotels are often secured and they give you a password good during your stay. Even on an unsecured network YOUR data is not really vulnerable to thieves. Wireless is achieved through a router. Many homes in here have routers and make use of wireless connections.

Once you have arranged for an ISP (Internet Service Provider) like Cox or Century Link, you have, in essence, arrived at the Internet. Now you need a Browser - such as Internet Explorer - to get you from site to site. If you think of the Internet as the Mall and the Websites as Stores, the ISP simply gets you to the mall. Now you need transportation to get from store to store. This is what the browser does. Internet Explorer, which comes with Windows, is the most widely used browser. Others are Firefox (from Mozilla), Chrome (from Google), AOL, MSN and more. Browsers are different from Search Engines such as Google or Yahoo. Search Engines are more like the directories at the Mall that guide you or show you available stores (websites). The Browsers take you from site to site. These are some settings in all Browsers that can greatly enhance performance. I will elaborate on Internet Explorer because that is the most utilized. Same principles apply to others. Finding them may take a minute.

Internet Explorer (including Edge)

If you use IE to explore the Internet, there are a few things that can improve the appearance and speed of your surfing. First of all, in all versions of IE the Menu Bar is not on by default. To turn it on, point anywhere in the top part of IE, RIGHT click and then check the line that says Menu Bar. IE 11 is considered the current of that browser. With Windows 10 it "morphed" into a version called Edge. To find out what version you are using, click the Help entry in the Menu bar and then click "About Internet Explorer". This will give you the version. If you are running Windows XP, IE 8 is as high as it will let you go. If you are running Windows Vista, IE 9 is the maximum. With Win 7 and 8 you can load the most current version. Edge is the default browser in Win 10 but IE is still there.

I have installed and use the Google Toolbar. This is free and provides several good functions. First, it shows a Google Search field at the top - no matter what page or site you are displaying. Secondly it does some pop-up blocking, which negates the need for the IE internal blocker. Use the View item in the toolbar to disable unused toolbars that may have been inadvertently installed. Google Toolbar is enough. You don't need: Yahoo Toolbar, AOL Toolbar, ALOT Toolbar, MSN Toolbar or even the AVG Toolbar. The fewer you have enabled, the faster and cleaner will be your performance. There are also some toolbars that are considered Malware (e.g. MyWebSearch)

In the Tools Menu, have a look at the Pop-Up Blocker and Phishing filter (or Smart Search) entries. I, personally, turn off IE's Pop-Up blocker because I use the Google Toolbar, which has a built-in blocker. I also turn off the Phishing (or SmartScreen) Filter because this slows down your browsing. Any Anti Virus helps in this regard. Neither would prevent the Rogue or HiJack programs from getting in. (See Anti Virus Handout) Another item to look at on the Tools Menu is the Manage Add-Ons entry. I would suggest you disable anything labeled as a "Browser Helper Object" or BHO. Sometimes you will find six, eight or more of these. Contrary to intuition, disabling them will speed your browsing. I liken these to hiring too many cooks who would spoil the broth. Also, often the individual helped is not you, it's them. With Edge, the settings are found under the three dots (…) in the upper right hand corner of the page. See Brower handout from January 22nd for reference to other browsers.

Under Tools, Internet Options, General tab you can set your home page. Also, under Delete, you should periodically get rid of the Temporary Internet Files and browsing History. Do not delete the cookies here, because this gets rid of the both the "good" cookies and bad ones. Use another program such as SuperAntiSpyware to clean the cookies. We will deal with more setting from here later.

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