What is a WAN, LAN, and Connectify?   By: Lisa Knight

What is a LAN? What is a WAN? What is Connectify Hotspot? How does this affect me?

A LAN (Local Area Network) is a private computer network that links computers at a single location, such as at a private residence or office building. Establishing a LAN allows files, software, and devices like printers and fax machines (or realtime software like CaseViewNet or Bridge) to be shared among the users of the LAN.

The Internet, by contrast, is a global, public WAN (Wide Area Network) that links millions of smaller networks with over a billion computers connected at any given time.   The most basic difference between a LAN and the Internet is that a LAN is private and localized, while the Internet is public and worldwide.

A LAN is able to facilitate sharing of files and resources by linking computers together through a central device known as a "router." The router acts as a go-between, directing data traffic on the LAN. Computers can be connected to the router using an Ethernet cable or wirelessly, using radio waves. A LAN does NOT automatically have Internet access (unless and until you provide it).

(I see you scratching your head even harder now, perhaps throwing up your hands screaming, "I give up! I'm never going to understand this stuff! I just want to go back to the more simple times of just being a court reporter. The only thing I had to worry about was how to spell names correctly and punctuate! Now I have to be some sort of computer genius!" Stick with me! I promise, by the end of this article, you will understand a little bit more about the ins and outs of wireless connections.)

Note: When you are providing realtime to your clients wirelessly (using a router or Connectify), you will be creating a LAN (or Local Area Network).

There are situations in which a LAN is setup for the sole purpose of providing Internet access (like Starbucks or the free airport WiFi). This is also handy for households that have two or more computers but only want to share an Internet account and nothing more. It's easy to see how using a LAN for this purpose could lead to the incorrect assumption that a LAN and the Internet are the same thing.

Many reporters find value to their client (and to themselves) to add Internet access to the LAN. This can be accomplished by plugging in an Ethernet cable to their router (free), using an aircard ($$), a cradlepoint router ($$), or creating their own hotspot from their smartphone($$). This allows counsel access the Internet while at the same time receiving their realtime feed. (This is important because if counsel use their own computer for a wireless realtime feed, they have to connect to your LAN, thereby negating their opportunity to use their

computer for anything they may need. They would have to disconnect from our LAN and go to another hotspot to do their other tasks, then reconnect.)

Connectify Hotspot is a "virtual" router for Microsoft Windows.   It can enable a Windows PC to serve as a router over Ethernet or WiFi. Along with a Windows 7 or 8 certified Wi-Fi device, it can act as a wireless access point. This enables users to share files, printers, software, and Internet connections between multiple computing devices without the need for a separate physical access point or router.   (It does everything the physical piece of hardware called the "router" does.)

You can also "drag" an exhibit, for example, to one of their clients sharing their Connectify hotspot. A window pops up on your client's computer telling them a file is ready for download.   Connectify can help you save on your data plan.