

Free Urban WiFi at last

I'm a big fan of free [WiFi]. On a recent business trip to the US it was abundantly clear that Ireland is miles behind our US counterparts in this area. Walking around downtown [Minneapolis] I stopped to get a coffee (not in [Starbucks]) popped out the laptop and away I went. Free, fast internet, it was a fantastic service which I'm sure is not unique to that café. Back in Ireland things are a little different. Oh don't get me wrong there are plenty of places with WiFi the only problem is you have to pay for it and its not cheap. StarBucks on Dame St. provides WiFi through...wait for it...[Eircom]. And you just know that isn't going to be cheap, it wasn't at €5 for 30 minutes. Therein lies the problem and it's a cultural problem at that. In the US and alot of Europe, small business owners see free WiFi as an incentive to customers to avail of their services in bars and cafés. WiFi doesn't actually costs most business alot to run, as more than likely the business will already have broadband. Extending this to customers is a simple and relatively inexpensive process. In cute wee Ireland though visitors are often shocked to discover that our valiant business men and women view this service, not as an incentive but as another way of draining their customers of every penny they can. It's a culture that extends all the way up through the business environment to the dizzy heights of corporate communication companies. Its not all bad news though. Today the Capital bars group announced that it's to provide free WiFi access in Cafe En Seine, Break for the Border, Zanzibar, the Grafton Hotel and Trinity Plaza following a deal with Free-hotspot.com. Capital bars I salute you!