

HierComm Networks Frequently Asked Questions



A. About HierComm Networks

A1. Who is HierComm Networks?

HierComm Networks was founded to operate a new, innovative smart relay wireless technology that was developed by our parent company HierComm, Inc. This technology was developed specifically in response to an identified need to eliminate the “rural digital divide” by providing true broadband Internet connections in rural and outlying suburban areas. After successfully demonstrating its new technology in the Town of Wayne, Washington County, Wisconsin, HierComm decided to bring its new technology to market. HierComm Networks, LLC was created to help fulfill the goal of delivering high performance broadband service in rural areas.

A2. How does HierComm Networks’ Internet connection work?

Each subscriber gets a small antenna mounted on his/her residence or business that establishes a wireless link with an antenna on one of several access points in a town or rural area. Each access point consists of a cluster of antennas that send and receive radio signals to the subscribers’ antennas. A separate antenna on the access point in turn connects the subscriber to a more distant tower where a direct connection is made to the worldwide web.

This approach, described as a sectoral cellular network, allows the network to use most of its available capacity to connect subscribers to the Internet. In contrast, so called “mesh networks”, in which each access point also relays signals from other access points, uses a significant amount of its capacity to relay signals to the point(s) with connections to the Internet.

A3. Is HierComm Networks service as reliable as other Internet services?

HierComm Networks’ service has proven to be very reliable, the experience we gained operating our commercial internet service in Washington County for several years has convinced us that the electronic equipment is very reliable. Any service that relies on equipment exposed to weather, such as telephones and electric power can be interrupted by weather related and natural events. Consequently, we can’t guarantee uninterrupted service, but we will strive always for the highest reliability in our service. With HierComm Networks, you’ll enjoy an always on, always secure connection that never ties up your phone line.

A4. Does HierComm Networks permit mobile connections?

As currently configured HierComm Networks service is not set up for direct access with portable devices. However, with local Wi-Fi on a Subscriber’s premises, a Subscriber will be able to use Wi-Fi enabled portable devices. Unlike some publicly accessible Wi-Fi hotspots there are no additional access fees charged to the Subscriber in order to use our network.

B. Advantages of HierComm Networks

B1. Does HierComm Networks have the same problem that some other wireless Internet services have with interference from trees and other obstacles?

Our network is designed with technology that minimizes the impact of common obstacles like trees. For many wireless services a single tree in the signal path degrades reception enough to break the connection. Any wireless service can be affected by obstacles and geographic features that disrupt radio signals. HierComm Networks has designed its network to provide robust connections and multiple access points in a town to give Subscribers the best available wireless network connection.

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B2. Why is HierComm Networks' service "symmetrical", with equal download and upload speeds? Why does it matter?

When discussing network through or speed it is necessary to distinguish between download speed (i.e. how fast web pages appear or files and pictures can be downloaded) and upload speed (i.e. the time required to send photos or files via the Internet. Traditionally, Internet services have chosen to offer much higher download speeds, on the order of 5 to 10 or more times the upload speed. The reason is that in the past most Internet users spent far more time downloading web pages, files and photos than sending, or uploading, information. Most Internet service providers assume that the historical pattern will continue. However, with the high growth of home based workers and offices, the rapid expansion of digital photo, video and music sharing, and the explosion in interactive social websites like You Tube, Face Book, My Space, and others, that assumption is becoming less valid.

HierComm Networks is one of very few broadband providers that offer symmetrical download and upload speeds. It may be the only one for which all services are symmetrical.

B3. How does the speed of HierComm Networks' compare to dialup, DSL, cable, fiber optic, satellite and other wireless services?

Comparing throughput, or speed, and price, we believe that our services compare very favorably with competing services and that we provide excellent value for the price of the service.

HierComm Networks Basic Residential service provides a connection at true broadband speeds of 3.0 Mbps and up to 10 Mbps or more than 50 to 160 times faster than a 56 Kbps dialup, which is the fastest dialup speed.

The following information was taken from a variety of sources and may not reflect the latest data for any particular service. Nonetheless, the information is representative of each type of service.

Download speeds of advanced DSL services, which are typically available only in densely populated areas, can be very fast (>10 Mbps) within a short distance from a switch; however, most users who live farther away will quickly see download speeds decline to 1 Mbps or less. Upload speeds are much lower, in the range of a few hundred megabits per second.

Depending upon the capabilities of the specific network, cable-based Internet services cover a very broad range of download speeds from roughly 23 Mbps to over 10 Mbps. Rarely, download speeds can exceed 20 Mbps in limited areas.

As might be expected, upload speeds are much slower, often around 0.5 to 0.7 Mbps and seldom exceeding 1.5 Mbps. Fiber optic systems are typically faster than cable networks, ranging up to a maximum of 50 Mbps download speeds for premium service. Most fiber optic connections have slower upload speeds (compared to downloading), but a few premium fiber optic services offer upload speeds up to 20 Mbps in limited areas.

Usually cable and fiber optic systems are available only in urban or more heavily populated suburban areas where a high percentage of residents are willing and able to pay premium service fees.

Most wireless Internet services offer download speeds ranging from 0.7 Mbps to a maximum of 3 Mbps with upload speeds from 256 Kbps to a maximum of 1 Mbps.

Satellite services, which provide service in any region with a view the country, are among the most expensive services with maximum download speeds of 1 to 5 Mbps and upload speeds only range from maximums of 128 Kbps to 300 Kbps, depending upon the level of service.

B4. How secure is my connection?

HierComm Networks' wireless technology uses the OFDM transmission protocol and proprietary design standards that enhance wireless data transmission. Although our network operates on unlicensed 2.4 GHz and 900 MHz frequencies, the same as Wi-Fi, your connection is secure.

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C. Using HierComm Networks

C1. Do I need a second telephone line to use your service?

No. Our Internet connection is provided wirelessly via the CPE antenna attached to your premises. Consequently, if you currently pay for a second telephone line so that you don't tie up your telephone while you are connected via dialup, with our service you would have the opportunity to give up the second line and save the extra monthly telephone charges.

C2. Can I use my telephone or fax machine when I am online?

Yes. Since HierComm Networks technology uses a separate wireless connection that leaves your phone line free. So, unlike dialup, you can be online without interfering with your telephone or fax usage.

C3. Can I use my HierComm Networks connection in more than one location?

Normally, you will only be able to use HierComm Networks connection at the Subscriber's premises equipped with our proprietary antenna. When you gain access with a laptop computer through another Subscriber's antenna via Wi-Fi or a direct cable connection, the services available to you are determined by the subscriber's service plan at that location.

C4. Can I share my HierComm Networks connection? If so, can all computers be online at the same time?

If you connect a wireless router to our network, you can connect other computers to the network simultaneously. Unless more than one user is sending or receiving very large files, there should be minimal impact on connection speed. One reminder is that under the Subscription Agreement you may not resell our services via a Wi-Fi connection.

C5. If my network connection is in one room, can I use my computer in another room?

Yes. If you wish to use your computer in more than one place on your premises and your computer is Wi-Fi enabled, it is easy to purchase, install and connect a wireless router to our CPE and connect from anywhere within range of your wireless router.

C6. Will there be any interference with my Wi-Fi router?

Some customers do experience some interference when using their wireless router. Since HierComm Networks and Wi-Fi use unlicensed 2.4 GHz and 900 MHz spectrum, there is some possibility of interference. However, your wireless router routinely operates properly despite many other sources of background noise (stray radio frequency signals) including cordless phones, Bluetooth devices, microwave ovens, and other electronic devices. Moreover, our network uses different communications protocols that permit both systems to differentiate their signals. In addition the antennas are far enough apart to substantially reduce the risk of interference.

C7. Will I need to make any adjustments to or perform any maintenance the antenna after it is installed?

No. When the technician completes the installation the antenna will be in the best position to send and receive signals and will not require any adjustment. The only time an adjust would be required is if we determine that we could give you better service via a different, access point. If that were to happen, our technician would schedule an appointment with you to reposition the antenna. Our equipment is designed for years of use without repairs. If there is a problem for any reason we will repair it (See the answer to question F7).

D. Hardware and Software Compatibility

D1. What computer hardware and software do I need to use HierComm Networks?

Our network will operate with any PC, Mac, or server that can communicate via a standard Ethernet connection. Alternatively, if our CPE is connected to a wireless router, your computer only needs to be equipped with 802.xx Wi-Fi. Compatible operating systems include Windows, Macintosh, or Linux. Typically, newer computers will have more memory and more advanced communications software to permit better connections.

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D2. If I already own a wireless router can I use it with HierComm Networks service?

Yes. Our installation terminates with standard Ethernet cable wall jack. You just have to connect your wireless router to the wall jack with standard Ethernet cable.

E. Getting Service

E1. Can I get HierComm Networks' Internet service?

Go to our website at: www.hiercommnetworks.com to find out if your Village, Town or Region falls in our current service area. If it does you can sign up for our service using our website.

E2. If my address is in your current service area are there any other factors that could affect whether I can get service?

Yes. Although our radio signal coverage in our service area is typically excellent, there are a few small areas where signal quality may be affected by a several factors such as topography, dense trees, or unusual "clutter" caused by large structures. For example, we may not be able to serve a home that has no direct line to an access point because it is shadowed by a large hill or surrounded by dense trees. At the time you sign up or inquire about getting our service we will consult our signal coverage maps to determine whether there may be a problem. It may be necessary to take signal measurements on site before confirming that service is or is not available to you. If signal strength is inadequate at your premises, we may be able to propose an alternative means to serve you.

E3. When will HierComm Networks offer service in my area?

Check our web site periodically since we will announce additions to our service area as soon as they occur. We also use direct mail to announce our service to new areas. If you receive one of our mailers you are in our coverage area.

F. Customer Service

F1. How do I set up my Internet service and email accounts?

You can sign up for service on our website and set up your primary email account. When the account has been created and the CPE equipment has been installed you can begin immediately using or Internet service. You can then access your account to add additional email accounts. Or you can call Customer Service at (262) 563-9362.

F2. Do you have a home page for current customers?

Yes. www.hiercommnetworks.net allows subscribers to sign in directly to access email and other Internet services.

F3. How do I set up a website with HierComm Networks?

To set up a website with HierComm Networks, please call or email Customer Service.

F4. Can I buy the HierComm Networks Customer Premises Equipment ("CPE") rather than lease one?

In order to be able to give you the best service, HierComm Networks prefers to own the CPE. By retaining ownership we are free to upgrade embedded software or hardware without delays. Except for damage caused by a subscriber, we also remain responsible for replacing any equipment that fails prematurely. We also assume full responsibility for disposing of replaced equipment.

F5. Do you provide customer support?

Yes. At the time of installation our technician will verify the connection and demonstrate how to use our Internet service. If you have questions later about how to use the service you can either call or email Customer Service.

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F6. Will you provide support for problems with my computer or wireless router?

No. While we routinely connect Subscribers' computer and wireless router to our CPE at the customers' premises, our staff is not trained to support our vendors' equipment and software. There are simply too many different types of equipment. We suggest that you contact customer service at either the seller or manufacturer of the PC or router.

F7. What happens if the Internet connection stops working?

If your connection stops working for any reason, call HierComm Networks customer service immediately to report the problem. We will promptly determine whether the connection problem is in your CPE unit, somewhere in the network, or externally caused.

If the problem is in the network or results from an external cause, we will fix the problem as quickly as is practical. If a CPE unit fails, HierComm Networks will determine the cause for the failure and replace the CPE unit promptly.

If the CPE hardware or software failed, the replacement will be made free of charge. If the CPE was damaged by the subscriber or by a third party, the subscriber or the third party who caused the damage will be responsible for the replacement cost.

Since the Subscription Agreement requires that the CPE in the Subscriber's possession be covered by Subscriber's property and casualty insurance company, we may seek reimbursement from the insurance company. Whatever the cause, we will do our best to restore service promptly and be fair to the Subscriber.

F8. How and when will I be billed?

Your monthly charges will be posted monthly to the credit or debit card that you gave us for billing when you signed up for our service. Each month the monthly service fee will be billed to your account on the day of the month that your service was initiated. We start billing on the day that the CPE is installed. For example, if your installation occurred on the 7th day of the month, your credit card will be charged on the 7th of each month you have our service.

F9. What are my payment options for my HierComm Networks services?

For your monthly service fee HierComm Networks payments can only be made with automatic monthly charges to a credit or debit card. For the installation charges and lease of the CPE equipment there is one option. Prepay the total amount with a single payment at the time of installation.

F10. Who do I contact for billing inquiries?

For billing questions, please call or email Customer Service. Go to Contact Us at our website for information and phone numbers.

F11. How can I change my billing method, billing address, other account information?

To change any billing or account information, please call or email Customer Service. Go to Contact Us at our website for information and phone numbers.

F12. How can I change my service plan?

To make changes to your service plan, please call or email Customer Service. Go to Contact Us at our website for information and phone numbers.