Frequently-Asked Questions

General Topics

What can I do with EchoLink?

EchoLink allows licensed Amateur Radio stations to connect to one another over the Internet. You can use EchoLink to connect your station (or your computer) over the Internet to other amateurs using the same software, and carry on a voice QSO. This greatly enhances the range and utility of mobile and portable VHF/UHF-FM stations, and also allows computer-equipped hams to access distant repeaters directly.

You can access EchoLink either with a radio or a computer. If you are in range of an FM repeater or simplex station equipped with EchoLink, you can use DTMF commands from your radio to access the EchoLink network. If you are a licensed amateur with an Internet-connected PC, you can access EchoLink stations directly from your PC.

How do I get started using it?

First, download the software from this Web site. You will be asked to provide your callsign and e-mail address. Then, install the software on your PC, be sure you have a good Internet connection (56k modem or better), and start it up to register your copy of the software. The final step is to provide proof of license so your callsign can be added to the system; see Validation for details. Then, you're ready to go.

Is EchoLink a digital mode?

No. EchoLink is an extension of conventional voice modes, particularly FM. EchoLink communicates over the Internet digitally, but does not transmit any digital signals over the air.

Is EchoLink an Internet "chat room"?

Definitely not. EchoLink is a system designed to provide VoIP gateways for repeaters and simplex stations. If you are interested in talking (by voice) with other Internet users from your computer, or you would like to participate in or set up your own Internet chat room, please use one of the many excellent software packages designed for this purpose, such as Skype.

Is there a separate "sysop" version of the software?

There is only one version of EchoLink, which can be operated either in "user mode" or "sysop mode". Switching to Sysop mode enables all of the features needed for connecting a transceiver to EchoLink using your computer's sound card and one of the popular interface boards offered by WB2REM, VA3TO, or West Mountain Radio. For more information, see Interfaces.

How does EchoLink handle security?

Each new user of EchoLink must be validated, which means providing positive proof of identity and license, before being granted access. See the

Validation FAQ for details.

After having been validated, each EchoLink user must provide a password, along with his or her callsign, to log in. Each time a connection is made for a QSO, the EchoLink servers verify both the sender and the receiver before communication can begin.

In addition, if you wish, you can configure EchoLink to accept connections only from certain types of stations: repeaters, links, users, or all three. You can also set up a list of any number of "banned" callsigns, which will not be allowed access. In addition, you can block or accept connections according to their international callsign prefix, in order to comply with your country's rules regarding reciprocal control-operator privileges or third-party traffic restrictions.

In Sysop mode, by default, EchoLink announces each station by callsign when the station connects. The EchoLink software automatically generates detailed logs and (optionally) digital recordings of all activity on the link.

What is the difference between EchoLink and IRLP?

EchoLink and IRLP are two separate systems that acheive a common purpose: Interconnecting Amateur stations by voice over the Internet.

The IRLP system consists of RF gateways (called *nodes*) and *reflectors*. Each node is either a simplex link or a link to a repeater (like an EchoLink Sysop node); there is no direct access from a PC. Each node supports only one connection at a time, but numerous reflectors are available (like EchoLink conference servers) to support roundtables and nets.

IRLP node owners purchase and install a custom interface board that comes with a special edition of the Linux software package on which the IRLP software runs. Each node has a 4-digit number, and one node can be linked to another using DTMF codes, similar to EchoLink. IRLP nodes can be customized by writing Linux shell scripts.

If you (or your club) are interested in setting up an RF gateway for both EchoLink and IRLP, a good choice might be EchoIRLP. EchoIRLP is a software package that can be added on to an existing IRLP node to allow it to connect to the EchoLink network. The result is a node that can connect (or receive connections) on either EchoLink or IRLP, using a single set of equipment.

If I install EchoLink on my PC, will I start getting viruses and "worms" from the Internet?

In short, no. Unlike software such as e-mail programs, file-sharing programs, and Web browsers, EchoLink does not have any way to accept files or "attachments" that might harm your computer. There are no known cases of EchoLink accepting or spreading a computer virus.

Any PC connected to the Internet should always be protected by some sort of Internet security hardware or software. It is important to keep this protection in place even after installing EchoLink. Some users have run into trouble with viruses and worms after installing EchoLink, not because of any problem with the software, but because they had removed or disabled this protection while troubleshooting connection problems. Keep this in mind, particularly if your computer remains connected to the Internet for longer

periods of time because you are running EchoLink.

What about remote control?

For enhanced remote control, EchoLink includes a built-in, password-protected Web server which can be set up to accept commands from any Internet-connected computer. Basic functions allow you to remotely enable or disable the link, disconnect stations, and see who is currently using it. The software also supports a basic and extended set of DTMF commands for control over a radio link. For example, you can key in either the node number or the callsign of the station you wish to connect to. EchoLink also supports full DTMF remote control over a dial-up telephone line, if a dedicated line is available.

Is EchoLink available for any platform other than Windows?

EchoLink is designed specifically to run under Microsoft Windows. Currently, there are no plans to offer versions of EchoLink for other platforms (except as noted below).

However, if you are running a Macintosh with OS X, you can use the program EchoMac by N9YTY, which is compatible with EchoLink. (Support for EchoMac is not available through the EchoLink Web site.)

Many users have also had success running EchoLink under Linux using the Wine compatibility layer. For example, EchoLink is known to work with Fedora Core 5 and above, with a few limitations. However, Linux is not an officially supported platform for EchoLink.

Is EchoLink available for a smartphone or PDA, such as an iPhone or a Windows Pocket PC?

Many handheld computers (PDAs) and smart phones now have wireless networking and audio capability. An edition of EchoLink for the Apple iPhone and iPod touch is now available, free of charge, at the App Store. You must already be a validated EchoLink user before you can use this edition of the program; if you are not already validated, please download and install the Windows version on a PC first, then follow the validation procedure as outlined on this site.

An edition of EchoLink for Android is also under development (with no release timetable yet), but there are no plans to offer EchoLink for other mobile platforms. Please note that Windows PC applications such as EchoLink cannot be installed on a Windows Mobile device.

Can I use EchoLink to set up a private link system?

EchoLink is offered free of charge to the worldwide Amateur Radio community for the purpose of setting up simplex and repeater links that can be accessed by other EchoLink users. Although there are security features that allow you to limit access to your node, the software (and the system in general) is not intended to be used to create closed or private systems.

How do you make any money on this?

We don't.

Do you accept contributions or donations?

Fortunately, because of the generous contributions of time and talent by volunteers, the only ongoing expenses are Internet bandwidth and occasional hardware and software maintenance. This is currently funded by the Vanity Node Number program. Please consider participating in this program if you wish to support EchoLink financially.

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