

Is it ever safe to join public Wi-Fi?

🕒 READ TIME: 2 MINS

👥 AUDIENCE: BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

Everyone has connected to public Wi-Fi; it is free and open and has no authentication required to use. It's at your favourite cafe, at the airport before you travel, it surrounds you in your city centre, but is it ever safe to join the public Wi-Fi?

Everyone has connected to public Wi-Fi; it is free and open and has no authentication required to use. This could be in a café, in the airport, or on a journey into the city center. However, many people are afraid of connecting to such networks considering the warnings that claim that it is an effortless way to be hacked. Ultimately, making a lot of people ask the question: Is it ever safe to join the public Wi-Fi?

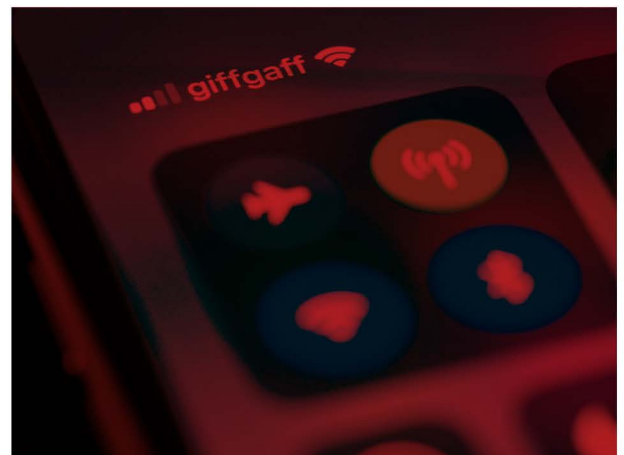
Unfortunately, this does not have a straightforward answer. It depends how careful you are and what measures you take to protect yourselves on the open network. Firstly, it should be noted that it is preferable to use mobile data as this is usually encrypted by default. If this is not possible you can connect to public Wi-Fi if you are of the risks and take the following factors in mind:

DISABLE AUTOMATICALLY CONNECTING TO WI-FI

Disable the following option in your phone's settings: Automatically connect to nearby Wi-Fi. You should be the one in control of when and which network your phone connects to.

SECURE VS UNSECURED NETWORKS

There are two types of open networks: Secure – where the user is often required to register using an email or phone or pay a small fee, and unsecured – where the user can immediately connect without having to register or go through any process describing who they are.



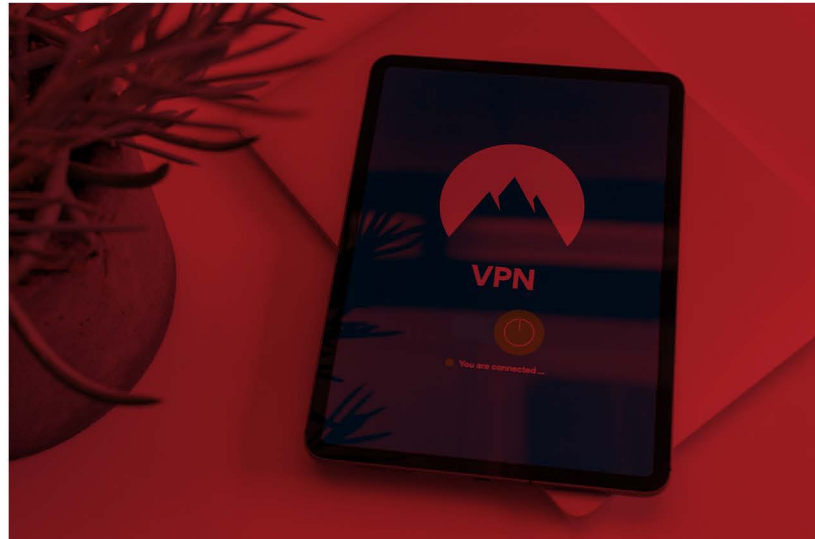
The Answer is Yes and No

ENCRYPTED WEB ADDRESSES

When visiting websites pay attention to if they have HTTPS in the web address, this will ensure that all traffic to and from the website is encrypted and nobody can easily capture sensitive data being sent to the remote server, such as credentials.

VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORKS

Use a Virtual Private Networks (VPN) that can encrypt all traffic sent to the web which makes browsing even more secure in public networks. VPNs are great tools for ensuring anonymity and privacy.



After applying the rules above, browsing the web through the public Wi-Fi becomes quite safe however, there is always some risk involved that cannot be completely disregarded. Therefore, you should avoid performing any financial operations using public networks such as making purchases or accessing a bank account. Browsing only services and websites that are known to the user is an additional step that can be applied for safe net surfing.

In Summary, the question of whether it is safe to use public networks or not can be answered with both a yes and no. Public Wi-Fi networks are very much a 'forbidden fruit' and can be used both for good and bad. However, your experience can tend to be a more positive one if you use networks with high caution and consider the rules and steps listed in this article.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Kamil Florowski is a software engineer, graduated from Lancaster Uni with the master's degree in Computer Science. He is passionate about innovative technologies and the development of software that can be used to improve everyone's daily lives.

Kamil is passionate about cyber-security and has recently worked with the Lancashire Cyber Foundry as a security analyst helping the client to ensure the security of its product.

