

BE MY GUEST

OFFERING GUEST WI-FI IS NOW THE NORM IN MANY SALONS, AND OFTEN SOMETHING EXPECTED BY CLIENTS. BUT YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL YOU'RE NOT INADVERTENTLY BREAKING THE LAW.

More than half (56%) of NHF members now offer Wi-Fi to clients as part of their salon experience, the NHF's most recent member survey concluded in the autumn.

Therefore, it is arguable we're nearly at the point where free Wi-Fi stops being considered "extra" and becomes "normal"; something clients expect to get as standard when they come into a salon.

At first glance, offering "guest" Wi-Fi to your clients seems simple enough. You just give them the access code to your router and leave them to it, right?

Wrong. Very wrong. Having an "open" guest Wi-Fi network is a recipe for trouble, and one that could get you into seriously hot legal water.

This is because if you offer public Wi-Fi access, you immediately have a number of new legal responsibilities.

There are three key laws, in particular, you need to be aware of. First, the Data Retention Regulations 2009. These were brought in to help the police and security services investigate and monitor criminal and terrorist activities.

Under this law, any "public communications provider" – in this case your salon – must retain key bits of data on whoever is using their public Wi-Fi. This includes user name and address, ID, log-in and log-off dates and times, and various other pieces of technical information, such as IP (internet provider) address.

ILLEGAL DOWNLOAD

Second, there's the 2010 Digital Economy Act. This is more focused on copyright theft and piracy.

Imagine a client comes into your salon, logs on to your Wi-Fi and then illegally downloads a movie while they're waiting. If you have no record of who that user is – and your site has no terms and conditions regarding this – you're the one deemed responsible and therefore at risk of being fined or prosecuted.

Thirdly, there's the Data Protection Act. This states that anyone providing public Wi-Fi must retain details

of those who have been using the site, and be able to provide these when requested.

On top of these legal responsibilities, you need to be aware of the importance of having filters in place limiting what can be accessed; for example, ensuring children in the salon can't access unsuitable information.

It also stands to reason you have to be sure any sensitive commercial salon or client data is unable to be accessed from the guest area.

So, what's the solution? On some routers you may be able to enable a "guest" setting. But this is a basic solution that is only going to offer limited protection and generally tends to be more suitable for home use rather than a commercial setting.

It's a good idea to speak to your internet service provider about any more bespoke solutions or pieces of kit they may be able to provide.

SPECIALIST PROVIDERS

Another possible option is to go to one of the guest Wi-Fi IT companies now on the market that specialise in offering products, tools or plug-ins that will ensure your guest Wi-Fi is both secure and legally compliant.

This is commonly achieved by adding a device that simply connects to your existing router, meaning you don't have to change your internet provider.

It collects all the legal information you need to keep, gives you a branded front or "landing" page, and access to a "dashboard" where you can see all the data gathered.

"The landing page is where customers fill in their details. But they only have to do it the once; after that they will normally just get a welcome page and then can continue online," explains Ryan Stephenson-Brown, director at guest Wi-Fi and technology provider Retail Secure.

"As a salon you need to make sure you are compliant and secure; you need to understand what you are offering to people. You also need to recognise the importance of having a system where customers are signing in, and you can track them, so you are not just giving out your Wi-Fi details," he adds.

IF NOTHING ELSE READ THIS...

- Guest Wi-Fi should not be "open"
- If you are providing guest Wi-Fi, you also have to meet various legal and data gathering responsibilities
- There are specialist providers that can help

