



Wi-Fi access will continue to serve downtowns well

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"Free public Wi-Fi is going to be taking off in a major way," predicts Ben Donsky, vice president of management and operations for the Chelsea Improvement Company. Whether the technology attracts new, high-tech businesses or simply creates an environment that encourages people to congregate in downtown cafes and public spaces, Wi-Fi can be an asset to many downtowns.

"In New York City we're already seeing the beginning of neighborhood-wide networks. There's one in the Dumbo neighborhood in Brooklyn. It's small but it covers a few blocks. Sunset Park in Brooklyn is also pursuing a network to provide free public access, and we are starting to create one for a big chunk of the west side of Manhattan. In the past, Wi-Fi networks have been pretty much restricted to public parks and private businesses, but we will soon be entering an era where Wi-Fi is just something you can get in a lot of neighborhoods that have BIDs."

Donsky disagrees with technology pundits who predict the end of Wi-Fi with the growing popularity of smartphones. "I have seen the opposite. The more people who have smartphones, the more users we're seeing on our networks."