

Google's gift: Free WiFi in 47 airports

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Search leader says it will pay the bill for wireless Internet during the holiday travel season.

Google is planning to foot the bill for WiFi at 47 of the nation's airports for the rest of the year, beginning Tuesday.

With some travelers spending more time on the ground in airports than on planes during the busy flying season, now seemed an especially fitting time to offer up the perk, Google said.

The list includes the international airports in Miami and Orlando, which are among the world's 30 busiest airports, as well as five others in Florida. Travelers through smaller airports, such as Montana's Billings and Bozeman, will also benefit.

"This is one of our holiday gifts to our users, and when you connect, we also hope you'll take the opportunity to try some of the latest Google products," the company said in a statement.

Upon signing in, users will be asked if they want to set Google (GOOG, Fortune 500) as their homepage or try the Google Chrome browser.

The company is also running a charity campaign to raise money for three nonprofit groups: Engineers without Borders, One Economy Corporation and Climate Savers Computing Initiative. When Google WiFi users first log on, the landing page will offer them the option of donating to the organizations. Google will match donations of up to \$250,000 per airport.

Google to buy mobile ad provider

Google has inked other free WiFi deals. It already offers free wireless Internet to its hometown of Mountain View, Calif., and last month it partnered with Virgin America to give the airline's customers free access to Gogo's Inflight Internet.

Both the airport WiFi deal and the Virgin America arrangement will end Jan. 15, after the holiday rush subsides.

While Google's move to offer free wireless in airports is an original twist, several companies are already running similar sponsorship campaigns on domestic flights.

E-commerce giant eBay (EBAY, Fortune 500) said it will provide free WiFi through Gogo on more than 250 domestic Delta Airline flights during the busiest travel week of the year, over the Thanksgiving holiday. From Nov. 24-30, flyers who log in will be taken to eBay's holiday-themed homepage and invited to "complete your holiday shopping while still en-route to your Thanksgiving destination."

Car maker Lexus wrapped up one week of complimentary Internet on American Airlines flights on Friday. The promotion coincided with the introduction of the 2010 Lexus LS line.