

# Home networking

## Multiplayer games

# Making connections

## Set up your first LAN party with no fuss

Networking isn't difficult with Windows XP – you can quickly connect PCs for fun!

### KEY DETAILS

#### SKILL LEVEL



#### NOW YOU CAN...



- ◆ Set up an ad-hoc local network
- ◆ Choose the best multiplayer games for a party

#### PROJECT TIME

**60** MINUTES

#### MORE INFORMATION

##### ON THE WEB

- ◆ <http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;314897>
- ◆ <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/search.aspx?categoryid=1&displaylang=en>

**Y**ou no longer have to be a networking genius to host a LAN (Local Area Network) gaming party. In fact, thanks to the Windows XP auto-sensing network capabilities, the install and configuration process is completed in under an hour. It's not magic, but it's close.

All you really need is a router, some networking cards, a few motivated friends and some multiplayer titles, and you can quickly link several PCs for fun and games.

### Build the network

Building a network is easier than you think. Wired or wireless, it doesn't matter –

Windows XP will make the job much easier. Once you install an Ethernet card, Windows XP will configure it automatically, find the network, and enable you to network with other PCs.

First you'll need a router, and the one you choose will depend on your gaming area. For example, if you're hosting the party in your living room or study, all the computers will be placed next to each other, so you can use a wired network. Simply buy an Ethernet router with RJ-45 jacks, such as the Netgear RP416, and this router requires no installation and no software configuration on Windows XP – you just plug it in. You should also buy

**Laptops can quickly be prepared for wireless networking with a wireless PC card.**



some CAT-5 cables, plug each cable into the router and run cables around the room.

The idea is that each player will bring their own computer, mouse and keyboard, so ensure you have enough deskspace for all your friends, along with a few extra power

points. As long as they have PCs with Ethernet cards installed, you're fine, but it may be worth having a few extras on hand in case they don't. Netgear makes some great Ethernet cards, so buy one or two as a backup.

The most important thing is to check the details with your

## STEP BY STEP WIRELESS NETWORKING

Set up a Windows XP wireless network in under 15 minutes for your LAN party



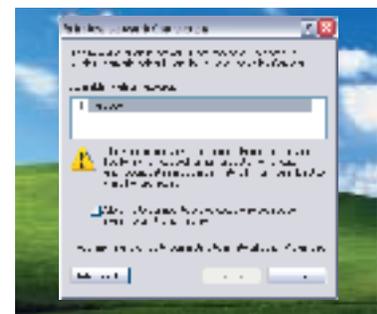
### 1 INSTALL YOUR ROUTER

Buy a wireless router, and install it on your internet connection. The Belkin 802.11g DSL/Cable Modem Gateway enables you to share a broadband connection, which is also helpful for downloading game patches.



### 2 ADD AN ADAPTER

There are several ways to add wireless networking functionality to each desktop, but the easiest is via USB. You'll need a 54g adapter to harness the speed of the router; Belkin and Linksys offer these, as well as slower 802.11b kit.



### 3 CONNECT AND GO

Once you have turned on the router and installed the USB wireless adapters, it will be automatically recognised by Windows XP. It will then connect the router to your wireless network, and your LAN is now up and running and ready for play.

players beforehand; find out what kind of PC they have and whether they already have a network card installed. When your friends arrive, you can then plug in the CAT-5 cables and Windows XP will automatically recognise the network. If you plan to host a party with people and their computers scattered around your house, a wireless network will work better. For details on setting up a wireless network, see the three-step walkthrough on the opposite page.

### Choose the games

Everyone has their favourite games, and this is something you should think about before the big event, as not all games work well for LAN parties. Find out which games your friends want to play, but ultimately you should pick the games you know best. That way, when everyone is ready to start, you'll make the decisions, plus you'll know how to configure the game for online gaming, load maps and show everyone the best tactics. There's nothing worse than hosting a

LAN party and finding that everyone argues about what sort of game to play.

As a general rule, everyone likes shooters; *Aliens versus Predator 2* is a good example, as it enables people to pick their playing style – you can play as the Predator and use stealth to sneak up on unsuspecting adversaries, while the alien is a growly menace with nothing but claws and attitude. Just don't pick the human – he boasts fewer special skills.

Before the party, make sure you have read the licence agreements for each game thoroughly and have enough copies of each available, or ask your visitors to bring their own games.

### Host the party

Once you have the network flying and the games all ready to go, it's time to get everything up and running. As your friends bring their computers, simply plug in the



PCI cards are cheaper for wirelessly networking desktop PCs.

dangling CAT-5 cables or just plug in their wireless USB adapters and Windows XP will automatically locate the network. If you have any trouble, just head over to the Network Control Panel and enable DHCP under the WINS configuration tab. Also, select the 'Obtain an IP Address automatically' option under the IP Address tab.

The benefit of using Windows XP is that these options are usually enabled by default, so mostly it's a plug-and-play affair. The only tricky part involves setting up the game for online play and then attaching to the host. For example, in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, it's simple to start the server – just select Host

Game, then configure the map options and select Start Server. Your players should go to Play Online, but there's an easy-to-miss option on the screen that must be enabled – you have to click next to the word Source until the Local option appears. The local server will then show up and you're ready to go.

Most multiplayer games will require some minor tweaking but just remember to look for a LAN or Local option when hosting a game, and don't try using the internet option. Some older games, such as Blizzard's amazing *Starcraft*, actually work much better on a local area network than they do online, thanks to tighter LAN code. ■

## WINDOWS XP AUTOMATICALLY CONFIGURES AN ETHERNET CARD AND FINDS THE NETWORK

### BALANCING ACT

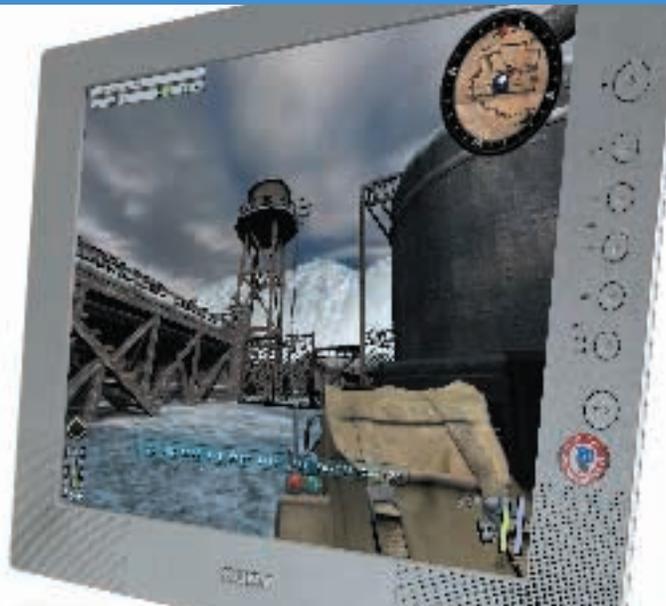
Keep your scores even by handicapping the best player

In a LAN party, you'll probably want to play first-person shooters, mostly because the slower strategy games like *Rise of Nations* might not hold everyone's attention. Sure, some of us enjoy building an ancient Roman city from the crusty ashes of a forgotten civilization, but not in a party situation. *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *Battlefield 1942* and *Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* work much better.

Be forewarned, though: there's always one expert player in the group and you might get a lot of complaints from your fellow gamers if you don't address the problem early on. A quick solution is to team the best player with the new players to even the odds; alternatively, handicap the group leader by forcing them to shoot with nothing but a pistol, or by choosing maps that require co-operation.

Here's a quick example. In the Team Last Man Standing mode in *Enemy Territory*, it's impossible to win unless your team all cooperate. At your LAN party, your uber-player will need help manning sniper points, guarding doors, and thwarting ambushes. Team Deathmatch works the same way; forcing the top player to look out for his teammates will make your party much more fun for all involved.

**Both free and fun, *Enemy Territory* is hands-down the best LAN party game.**



### Guess what?

Playing MMORPGs

A lot of people are confused about massively-multiplayer online role-playing games. No, you can't play Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings at your LAN party – it requires a massive server to hold all the user account information and so on. The game world alone is huge and all the character attributes and quests must be given out from a central location, and your computer wouldn't be able to handle all the game data.