

Opening Ports on your Router - Port Forwarding

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Most, if not all, internet users use a router to connect their network to their ISP's DSL or cable modem. One of the key ingredients in getting a web server, email server or even a remote desktop connection to function properly is to make sure the inbound traffic destined for that machine actually reaches it. The router by default prevents users on the Internet from accessing PC's connected to your local network.

So you want to run a server, but how are people going to get to your server if your router is not allowing people to connect to your PC? Routers have a feature called port forwarding; port forwarding is a mechanism used to take Internet traffic destined for a particular port and then sending it to a computer on your local network. To do so involves opening and forwarding traffic on the proper ports. These ports are determined by the application in question; some common ones include 21 for FTP servers, 25 for SMTP mail, 80 for web servers etc. You will have to determine which ports you need to open based on the needs of your particular software.

There are many router manufacturers and each of them make several different models of routers, with new ones coming out almost daily it seems. Since space and time prevent us from showing detailed instructions for every possible router on the market today, we highly recommend the third part site, PortForward.com (<http://www.portforward.com>). This site will cover most of the more commonly available brands and should give you enough insight to be able to perform the needed steps on similar equipment you may have.

Remember too that opening and forwarding ports on a router effectively exposes your internal network to the Internet. You should only open the ports that are needed to get your applications to work and always make sure your computers have all the latest patches and security updates applied in order to minimize the possibility of someone compromising your network.