

Google, Skype in Startup to Link Hotspots

By *srlinuxx*

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Google Inc. and eBay Inc.'s Skype are investing in a startup that plans to help hotspot owners charge for Wi-Fi access, a plan that could face significant opposition from Internet service providers.

The Internet heavyweights were joined by venture capital firms Index Ventures and Sequoia Capital in making a \$22 million investment in FON, the Spanish startup. In its announcement Sunday, FON did not say how much each investor was contributing.

FON's idea, floated just three months ago in a Web posting by founder Martin Varsavsky, is to sign up people who have Wi-Fi hotspots in one of two ways.

"Linus" members, named after Linus Torvalds, who created the freely distributed Linux software, will share their hotspot with other Linus members for free.

"Bill" members, named after Microsoft Corp. founder Bill Gates, will charge for access to their hotspot. FON will get some of that revenue, and share it with Internet service providers, or ISPs.

The network has gained 3,000 Linus members since going live in November. There is no software yet for Bill members, but Varsavsky expects it to be ready within four months. Linus software is so far only available for Wi-Fi routers from Linksys, a division of Cisco Systems Inc.

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