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Though this issue has been forced into the public eye by the Marriott situation, the question of whether Mi-Fi and other personal WLAN devices can be used anywhere, simply because they use unlicensed spectrum, has implications far beyond the hotel space.

Though I personally find Marriott's arguments and motives to be profit-driven and technically weak in places, I also sympathize a bit with the bigger challenge of keeping private WLAN "healthy" in the presence of competing devices. Society and the use of Wi-Fi have evolved to the point where for many organizations, from hospitals to corporations to universities, private WLAN has become critical to many of us. We run voice communications, medical equipment signalling, locking devices, and a wide range of other applications over very expensive and meticulously designed wireless network environments. In the current regulatory state of things, anyone can bring a Mi-Fi device into a dense WLAN environment and cause disruption to local connectivity. It's easily demonstrated, and is a thorn in the side of wireless network administrators far and wide.

At minimum, private WLAN environments should be able to deny the use of these devices by policy at no risk of running afoul of FCC regulations, to include forcibly removing the devices from the premises when used in private WLAN space. Furthermore, there needs to be delineation between production private WLAN environments (again- hospitals, corporations, educational settings, etc) and environments like lodging that become "home" for a brief period. In the former, WLAN administrators should be able to invoke whatever steps are necessary to render Mi-Fi devices unusable to incentivize their removal (can be impossible to track down physically) to preserve the fidelity of the critical WLAN used for business operations. If this point has to hinge on the private WLAN providing no-cost guest access to visitors before enforcement is allowed, so be it. In the latter, where lodging is involved, guests should be able to use their own Mi-Fi if free robust Wi-Fi is not available to users.

The overall Wi-Fi landscape has become extremely nuanced and has an undeniable business operational focus in many environments. That needs to be recognized and protected by allowing private WLAN to use the same protections that got the Marriott in trouble, or business Wi-Fi is doomed to potential erraticness and interference by any device that's brought on premise. At the same time, if robust free guest service is not available, it's reasonable to expect people to use their own Mi-Fi.