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## 12 business | ESSENTIALS

### TOOLS OF THE TRADE

By Stephen Pritchard

## The Solwise HomePlug networking system

Companies have been looking at ways to carry data over power cables in homes or offices for a few years now. The thinking is simple: rather than run new wires to every computer, use the existing electricity cables instead.

But achieving high-speed, reliable and cost-effective data transmission this way is not straightforward. Equipment has to filter out the noise created by the mains electric current, keep the data secure and make sure the network connection is safe to use.

However, several

manufacturers believe they now have viable powerline networking equipment. Most work in broadly the same way, providing sets of adaptors that plug into the mains socket. The adaptor connects in turn to a computer or other networked device using a conventional ethernet cable.

Once this is done, it is just a question of turning on the adaptors, the computers and possibly a switch or router for a shared internet connection. The result should be a fully working network, in minutes.

The Solwise powerline converters tested here lived up to expectations in that respect. There is no need to install drivers on an ethernet-equipped computer, and the Solwise adaptors work happily on their own, or in combination with machines attached to conventional ethernet sockets, or a wireless LAN. The HomePlug has a basic wireless access point built in, adding to its flexibility.

At home, powerline networking is a quick way of connecting parts of the house that are too far apart to reach with a single, wireless router. The system easily carries traffic from a broadband ADSL or cable connection around the house, as long as the cable modem or ADSL router has ethernet ports.

The Solwise boxes are also a good way of connecting older computers that have ethernet but not wireless, as there is no need to open up the machine to install it.

The system does have downsides, though. The first is speed: a wireless connection could well prove faster; a wired connection certainly will be. In tests, it took 54 minutes to transfer a 1.2GB file between two machines.

The second drawback is that the units have to be used in pairs, at the very least. Although a computer can connect to a Solwise box using a wireless link, there has to be another HomePlug at the

other end for the system to work. To hook two machines to a router takes three boxes, adding to the cost. This might be a minor drawback in the home, especially in one where it is hard to get good wireless coverage. But most offices



will find the better performance of wired ethernet outweighs the inconvenience.

**RATING:** 3 out of 5.

**PROS:** flexible alternative to wired networking.

**CONS:** slow and relatively expensive.

**COST:** £69.18 including VAT.

**CONTACT:** www.solwise.co.uk