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NEW PRODUCTS

SOLWISE PL-85PEW

Best of both worlds

What should you use to network your home – Wi-Fi or HomePlug?
How about both? **Andy Shaw** looks at a device to bridge the divide



When you embark on networking the devices in your house, whether they're computers, media devices, games consoles or PDAs, you've got a few decisions to make. Chances are you probably aren't interested in running Ethernet cables all over the place, so a wireless network is the obvious choice. Wi-Fi has its limitations however, especially if you live in a big house or have thick walls. The main alternative is the HomePlug option, which connects your computers via your electricity sockets. Or, with this handy device from Solwise, you could use both.

Features

The PL-85PEW serves two functions. It plugs directly into a mains socket, and uses your electrical wiring to connect to other HomePlug devices you may have in other sockets around your house. It also has an aerial and all the things it needs to create a simple Wi-Fi network, essentially linking any Wi-Fi products you may have into your HomePlug network. For those who already

★★★★★

Performance

The speed of HomePlug networks (a maximum of 85Mbps) is generally faster than Wi-Fi (current standard maximum 54Mbps), so this is also a handy way of getting Wi-Fi access in places where you might not otherwise be able to get it, especially if the biggest problem you've got is thick walls that block radio waves. The usual HomePlug security – which stops people from the outside accessing your data

★★★★☆

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Solwise Wi-Fi
HomePlug adapter

- is present here, and for the Wi-Fi side of things, you can protect your network with the standard WEP or WPA options.

Ease of use

★☆☆☆☆

Unfortunately, the ease of setting up the device is one of its weakest areas. It bridges two different types of networks - Wi-Fi and HomePlug - so you need to have a decent grasp of both. The supplied software is adequate to get you started but falls short on help if you get stuck. The in-depth manual, contained on the disk, has a tendency to descend into internet jargon with little warning, which isn't much fun for the non-technically minded.

Value for money

★★★★☆

The device is the first HomePlug unit we've seen that performs this dual function, so seems reasonably priced - about half as much again as Solwise's standard HomePlug adapters. However, keep in mind that this product alone will not create a network - you'll need HomePlug adapters for any other devices you want to add to it. Also, it's worth pointing out that a faster HomePlug networking standard, with a maximum speed of 200Mbps, is just starting to appear, so those new to HomePlug with a desire for heavy-duty networking (like transferring video files, for example) may want the faster standard.

Verdict

★★★★☆

The nature of this product means that it's quite a specific device - something for those who already have HomePlug networks and want the ability to add in Wi-Fi devices. It's a useful product to have if you are thinking of starting a network though, as HomePlug has advantages over Wi-Fi, particularly in larger and sturdier buildings. And if you're looking for the best of both worlds in terms of home networking, this device certainly bridges the gap.

Solwise
PL-85PEW

£67.01 inc VAT

For Handy for creating a Wi-Fi hotspot in an existing HomePlug network

Against HomePlug and Wi-Fi combo can confuse set up

Requires existing HomePlug network

Specifications

85Mbps HomePlug 1.0 compatible
54Mbps IEEE 802.11g Wi-Fi compatible
WEP/WPA Wi-Fi security

Contacts Solwise, 0845 458 4558,
www.solwise.co.uk



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