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Mac buyers' guide

ROBOTS



Macworld **Reviews**

Solwise HomePlugs

Simple devices that plug directly into the mains for clutter-free networking

Networking

PL-85PE HomePlug Ethernet Turbo



Manufacturer: Solwise
www.solwise.co.uk

Pros: Plug and play operation, network by Ethernet without trailing wires, robust build, add extra units anywhere there's a mains socket to extend network

Cons: Security features are Windows PC only

Min specs: Ethernet port

Price: £37.45

Star rating: ★★★★★

PL-85PEW HomePlug Wireless G Ethernet Adaptor

Manufacturer: Solwise
www.solwise.co.uk

Pros: Plug and play networking, AirPort and AirPort Extreme compatibility, extends range of wireless network, multiple devices can be used as repeaters

Cons: Flimsy build, pulls apart a little too easily, plug grows warm to the touch quickly

Min specs: Ethernet port, AirPort or AirPort Extreme

Price: £67

Star rating: ★★★★★

plug that looks like a mains adaptor. Simply plug this into a wall socket and, with the supplied Ethernet cable, connect it directly to your Mac. (For best performance you should avoid surge protectors and extension blocks as they have a significant effect on data speed.)

Although sold singly you need at least two HomePlugs to create a network. For example, if you wish to share an internet connection with a computer in a remote part of the house you'll need one plug to connect to the modem or host machine and a second to connect to the other computer. Thankfully, networking with these devices is blessedly simple – just plug them in and they configure themselves. You can find the IP address for your device through the Ethernet section of your Mac's System Preferences if you need to connect directly to another machine, to swap files, for example.

In our tests we used the HomePlug Ethernet Turbo to share an internet connection between machines, swap files and download video. Future uses will include transmitting broadband TV to equipped devices. This device is just about fast enough for that, though never hardware based on the 200Mbps HomePlug AV standard is now being released.

The HomePlug Ethernet Turbo is a great solution for machines that lack wireless capability or in homes where the walls are too thick or rooms too remote to make wireless viable. It's faster than wireless too – with AirPort Extreme and 801.11g achieving top speeds of just 54Mbps. All in all it's a great product.

Solwise PL-85PEW HomePlug Wireless G Ethernet Adaptor

The PL-85PEW is a companion to the HomePlug Ethernet Turbo. Like the PL-85PE, the HomePlug Wireless is an 85Mbps network adaptor with Ethernet connectivity. It even uses the same technology from InTellon to achieve this. However, this product also has built-in 801.11g wireless capability, enabling you to connect devices to the network via AirPort. In a typical scenario you might have an Ethernet HomePlug connected to a router or modem with the HomePlug Wireless adaptor in another part of the house, serving several compatible devices.

Despite the shared technology, the HomePlug Wireless is significantly different in appearance to its sibling. A larger, plastic, snap-together casing makes the unit feel a bit flimsy, and a screw-on wireless antenna

On the wire The HomePlug Ethernet Turbo brings high-speed networking to every room through your home's electrical wiring. Useful for large offices and old houses, with thick walls



Extend your range The PL-85PEW combines HomePlug networking technology with Ethernet and 801.11g wireless connectivity

protrudes from it, making it a lot less unobtrusive than the plug-styled PL-85PE. External LEDs let you know when the unit is powered on and connected to wireless or Ethernet networks.

Trivial reservations aside, the HomePlug Wireless works well. AirPort detected the unit shortly after it was turned on and connected to it quickly and effortlessly. There's no wireless security enabled by default though, and that has to be configured through a browser-based interface if you want to lock down your wireless network. There's a default IP address encoded in the unit, but this may not be available to it, which means digging through your preferences to retrieve the address.

An issue that the HomePlug Wireless shares with its Ethernet-only partner is that although both units are password protected, and the password is printed on a label attached to the devices, you can't currently change the password on a Mac – both devices ship with a Windows-based utility to do that, but no Mac equivalent. It's not a huge problem, though, as the utility isn't essential to the correct operation of the devices.

The HomePlug Wireless would be useful in any number of situations. As it uses the 801.11g protocol it should be compatible with all AirPort Extreme-enabled devices. This makes it ideal for streaming music over a network or as a simple wireless repeater to extend the range of your network over a wider space.

Macworld's buying advice

This generation of HomePlug products come into their own in larger homes or older buildings where a single wireless hub can't cut it. Using the HomePlug 1.0 standard, they shift bits and bytes around your electrical system faster than current wireless standards. The HomePlug Wireless is a convenient and easy way to extend a wireless network too – but remember that you'll need to couple it with a HomePlug Ethernet Turbo (or other HomePlug device) to create a network. The same advice goes for the Ethernet-only version. Also, keep in mind that faster HomePlug AV devices, with speeds of 200Mbps, are now becoming available.

Karl Hodge

Tired of trailing cables running between your network of Macs? Want to share your internet connection with a games console or laptop in another part of the house? HomePlug technology might be the solution. A relatively recent innovation in networking, the HomePlug standard is used in a range of devices that plug directly into power sockets, carrying network data through your home's electrical system.

Solwise PL-85PE HomePlug Ethernet Turbo

The Solwise HomePlug Ethernet Turbo is capable of shifting 85Mbps of data through your home's wiring. Out of the box the unit is anonymous and unobtrusive; a black

