WIRELESS NETWORKING

Senao Engenius

Don't mind the gap with this outdoor wireless multi-client bridge/access point

The only connection required is a single UTP cable to carry both power and data

The Engenius kit contains everything required to deploy a weatherproof outdoor wireless bridge, but you will need one at each end of the link

When it comes to linking networks at different sites, there aren't many options. Cheap ADSL services are slow, while faster SDSL or leased lines are costly to run. Laying cables of your own can, similarly, cost a fortune and isn't always practical, which is why more and more companies are looking to wireless solutions that are both cheap and easy to deploy, such as this device from Senao.

You can tell from the name that the Engenius Outdoor Wireless Multi-Client Bridge/Access Point can do a lot more than just bridge networks together. It can also be used to wirelessly extend an existing Lan or as a conventional access point to support mobile clients, for example, at an outdoor event or on a large site where users need to stay connected as they move around.

Most, though, are sold as wireless bridges, calling for two of the kits to be installed – one at each location. To this end each kit contains a small 802.11b/g wireless bridge/access point, housed in a wind and weather-tight plastic case with a separate screw-on mounting, ready for fixing to either a wall or a mast. To further simplify deployment the basic models have internal aerials, rated at 9dB, though other versions are available with higher gain and external antennas to cover longer distances.

Power is supplied via a 48V AC adapter with a Power over Ethernet (PoE) injector also provided, to feed the power over a standard UTP cable. Alternatively, if you already have an 802.3af-complaint PoE setup, that can be used instead. Either way you only need to run one UTP cable to the unit, terminated within yet another weatherproof fixing.

The bridges need to be in line of sight of each other to maximise the signal, which means high up on a building or mast. We were limited to just 40-50m for our tests but the supplier, Solwise, reckons that with the correct antennas it's possible to cover distances of up to 10km. As is always the case with wireless, throughput rates will depend on signal strength, but bear in mind that it's a bridged connection so you may need intelligent switches or routers at each end to filter broadcasts and other unnecessary traffic.

The hardest part of the installation is the physical mounting (a head for heights is useful), after which the device is configured and managed via a remote web-based interface – just like an ordinary, indoor, access point. Here you'll find all the usual options to, for example, configure the wireless SSID, select the channel to use and opt for either 802.11b or 802.11g operation, or both. You can also limit access based on MAC address and encrypt transmissions, with a choice of Wep, WPA or WPA2 security along with optional Radius (Remote Authentication Dial-In User Service) authentication when WPA/WPA2 are used.

It's all pretty straightforward, and the only real issue is the supporting documentation, which we found a little lacking in places and not always well translated. Despite that, it only took a few minutes to get the two units communicating and once it's all up and running there's very little else to do. Management is minimal, there's very little to go wrong and you don't have to pay any monthly fees for the privilege of linking your networks together.

Alan Stevens

Details

Price £147.04 (£125.14 ex Vat)
Best price www.pcw.co.uk/bestprices
Contact Solwise 01234 1213 456 www.solwise.co.uk
Specifications 802.11b/g wireless bridge/access point • Weatherproof casing • 802.3af PoE compliant • PoE injector • Point-to-point or multi-point bridge or optional access point operation • Wep, WPA or WPA2 security • Radius authentication for WPA/WPA2 security • MAC address filtering • Web-based management • SNMP support

Verdict

Pros Complete weatherproof kit ready for mounting; bridge or access point operation; PoE support
Cons Supporting documentation could be better

Features	★★★☆☆
Performance	★★★☆☆
Value for money	★★★★☆

Overall An easy way to wirelessly link networks together and avoid costly service charges

★★★☆☆