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01/01/2011 |

Competition for next-generation broadband in Australia

20/10/2010 05:58

Articles - The Age

Buy or beware - competitors gear up to do battle with NBN[1]

No NBN price war, despite competition[2]

My Comments

There have been some recent articles about next-generation broadband services appearing in or being planned for particular locales in Australia that compete with the government-backed National Broadband Network.

UK and France offering competitive broadband service

Two countries, namely the UK and France, have established the idea of competitive next-generation broadband after their success with achieving competitive ADSL broadband Internet service. This is because the governments in these countries have worked ahead by establishing a mandatory competitive telecommunications régime including encouragement of local-loop and sub-loop unbundling. They have even been cited by the European Commission as examples when it comes to broadband-Internet service being competitive and affordable for most people.

In France, the government have encouraged competitive fibre-to-the-premises service in the form of two methods. The first method is for one or more providers to share infrastructure, especially that which goes "to the door", while the second method permits a provider or provider coalition to have their own fibre infrastructure "to the door". That same country also encourages unbundled local-loop ADSL provisioning or "degrouper" in order to see competitive ADSL broadband service.

In the UK, the government is encouraging Unbundled local-loop ADSL provisioning and there are companies who are setting up or planning local next-generation broadband infrastructure in certain cities, towns and villages. These setups, which are based on either fibre-to-the-cabinet with VDSL copper runs or fibre-to-the-premises technology, are even being done as a way of giving rural households access to real broadband even though Openreach, the UK company in charge of the wired telecommunications infrastructure, are taking their time to provide this service. As well, Openreach is slowly rolling out a next-generation broadband network that will work on either fibre-to-the-cabinet or fibre-to-the-premises technology.

The Australian next-generation broadband direction

In Australia, regular wireline broadband is provided through one of two methods. Cable-modem broadband is provided by Telstra or Optus in the major capital cities or through TransACT in Canberra or Neighborhood Cable in Geelong, Ballarat or Mildura. These companies own their own cable infrastructure "to the door". ADSL infrastructure is provided by different retail providers who either resell Telstra ADSL service or through Optus who either may resell Telstra service or use local-loop unbundling. Recently, some other ADSL providers are selling retail ADSL broadband in a "local-loop unbundled" manner with a few offering "naked ADSL" service which doesn't provide classic landline telephony on the same line.

The Labor Party had started action on the National Broadband Network which is to be a fibre-to-the-premises network covering most metropolitan, regional and rural areas of Australia with wireless and satellite technology to cover the rest. It was also intended to be a replacement for the copper telephone network that is managed by Telstra and there was the idea for Telstra to decommission this copper network and hand it over to the National Broadband Network authority. This is in a similar manner to how the Openreach entity has come about when it came to provisioning wireline telephone and broadband service in the UK. Lately, there was a key issue raised about the service being delivered on an "opt-out" arrangement with customers being charged AUD\$300 if they don't have their property connected to the NBN during the actual rollout and want to continue with their classic phone service at their property after the copper network is decommissioned.

TransACT and Neighborhood Cable are offering National Broadband Network their infrastructure at a price that suits them or they will run a competing next-generation broadband service in their operating areas. As well, i3 Group are working with the Brisbane municipal government to set up a fibre-to-the-premises next-generation broadband service in inner-north Brisbane and intend to run it as a competing service if National Broadband Network set up infrastructure there.

At the moment, the main markets to watch when it comes to next-generation broadband are the metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne areas because of them being population centres in Australia. It will be interesting to see whether companies or local governments will set up next-generation broadband infrastructure there in competition to National Broadband Network.

Questions to be answered

One main question that is to be answered is whether it will be feasible for competing infrastructure providers to set up shop alongside the NBN especially in major markets. This includes whether a building landlord or body corporate can have control over the provision of infrastructure for competing service providers.

Another question is whether IP-based broadcasting and voice/video telephony will be controlled on the NBN so as to prevent access to the network by competing IP-based telephony and TV providers. This may be a game changer when it comes to the provision of subscription TV through Australia because it could open up a pathway for retail operators and others to offer competing or complementary multi-channel TV services. It may also affect IP-based telephony providers like Skype or “virtual-network operators” who don’t own their own infrastructure locally but want to provide competing or complementary telephony services.

Conclusion

If there is a desire to see competitive next-generation broadband service in Australia, there will have to be rules and regulations set up to ensure this kind of competition and if the government is serious about this, they should look at what France and the UK are doing to achieve the competitive broadband market there.

Links

[1]

<http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/buy-or-be-ware-competitors-gear-up-to-do-battle-with-nbn-20101017-16okz.html>

[2]

<http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/no-nbn-p-rice-war-despite-competition-20101015-16ngy.html>

HP Asia-Pacific Innovation Summit—My take on it

18/10/2010 04:47

I have been following the HP Asia-Pacific Innovation Summit through feeds from Facebook and Twitter. It has become a chance for HP to launch printers relevant to the enterprise market but they have put the spotlight on a key feature.

HP ePrint

I have talked about HP ePrint when I reviewed[1] the HP Photosmart Wireless-E B110a “network printing appliance” on this site. This printer had as its main party trick the ability for a user to forward an email to a specified address in order to have it printed out. As well, it was able to run apps like online colouring books or newspapers-on-demand downloaded from a special Website ran by HP.

Later on, I touched on[2] Apple’s desire to have these printers work with their AirPrint setup for printing from iOS devices (iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad). From this event I had heard that 85% of smartphone users were wanting to have “there-and-then” hard copy of documents or other material that they bring up on these devices. As well, I had heard that the Apple AirPrint technology will be enabled on the LaserJet lineup of printers as well as the OfficeJet lineup of inkjet printers.

This event also was a chance to justify the business case for implementing HP ePrint technology in business-class printers. The main benefit was to provide accelerated mobile productivity because of its ability to satisfy the demand to “have hard copy now” while I use my smartphone or portable computing device. It

also emphasised the fact that the printer is not just a dumb device but a fully-capable appliance as I have noticed with the Photosmart B110a.

Some put up an idea of using Instapaper “newspaper-on-demand” technology with this HP ePrint technology to provide a “hot-off-the-press” daily newspaper from these printers, As well, Matteos Del Campo who founded SPAN Architecture and Design had highlighted the ability to print plans for the Austrian Pavilion for the World Expo over the Internet from around the world using HP ePrint technology. This was done using the ePrint&Share plugin for AutoCAD.

I still had further questions to ask such as whether HP ePrint could allow for a “universal driver” setup and if this kind of technology, especially the “print by email” function, could support business operations who want to provide printing in conjunction with public Internet access.

Other News

HP also had used this event to launch the smallest colour laser printer which has the footprint of a typical desktop monochrome laser printer. I had the usual reservations about this one as I have with other colour laser printers due to the cost of replenishing the printer

They had also introduced a “copy fix” technology that improves the quality of copies made from bound originals. This is by “squaring up” the copy if the original is not squared to the edges as well as cutting out the dark background that occurs due to the lid not being closed when you copy or scan these originals.

Links

[1]

[/2010/08/product-review-hp-photosmart-wireless-e-multifunction-printer-b110a/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed](http://2010/08/product-review-hp-photosmart-wireless-e-multifunction-printer-b110a/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed)

[2]

[/2010/09/apple-ios-4-2-beta-becoming-enabled-with-handset-driven-printer-access/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed](http://2010/09/apple-ios-4-2-beta-becoming-enabled-with-handset-driven-printer-access/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed)

Brisbane plans its own fibre-optic next-generation broadband network

16/10/2010 07:27

Articles

Brisbane plans own fibre network | The Australian[1]

Brisbane strikes out on broadband | The Age[2]

My Comments

This project, which is instigated by the City of Brisbane, is similar to various British next-generation broadband projects that have been established by i3 Group. The key feature about these projects is that they use publicly-owned sewer mains to lay the fibre-optic cable rather than liaising with the local councils to dig up the roads for this purpose.

The main question is whether the service will be fibre-to-the-premises or fibre-to-the-cabinet which has a copper run to the premises. This also includes whether multi-tenant developments will have full fibre-wiring or copper wiring to each premises in the building.

There is an intention that the service will be a wholesale effort which means that Telstra, Optus and other ISPs can resell the Internet service like they do with ADSL broadband Internet or 3G wireless broadband.

This installation is backed by i3's private funding and will be in a position to be in competition with National Broadband Network. But there may be a question about whether this will be like the way Box Hill and neighbouring suburbs were provided with mains electricity service by an entity ran by the Box Hill City Council (now City of Whitehorse) rather than the State Electricity Commission before the mains electricity market was reorganised and privatised in the 1990s. This could mean whether i3 have exclusive rights to provide next-generation broadband Internet infrastructure to Brisbane only or can provide in competition with NBN.

As well, another question would be whether the effort will extend to properties in Brisbane's central activities district or be able to cover most or all of the suburbs in Brisbane.

This may end up with questions about private or municipal efforts to bring next-generation broadband to Australian towns and cities, including efforts to provide proper broadband to regional, rural and remote towns through this country; and whether these competing efforts will be threatened by the National Broadband Network or provide some healthy competition.

Technorati Tags: Brisbane[3],Australian[4],British[5],Group[6],sewer[7],cable[8],roads[9],purpose[10],cabinet[11],tenant[12],intention[13],effort[14],Telstra[15],Optus[16],ISPs[17],Internet[18],ADSL[19],installation[20],competition[21],National[22],Broadband[23],Network[24],Hill[25],suburbs[26],Council[27],Whitehorse[28],State[29],Commission[30],rights[31],infrastructure[32],activities[33],district[34],efforts[35],Articles[36],councils[37],developments[38],fibre[39],optic[40],whether[41],copper[42]

Links

[1] http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/brisbane-plans-for-its-own-fibre-network/story-fn59niix-1225938922604?referrer=email&source=AIT_email_nl&emcmp=Ping&emchn=Newsletter&emlist=Member

[2] <http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/brisbane-strikes-out-on-broadband-20101014-16lx2.html>

[3] <http://technorati.com/tags/Brisbane>
[4] <http://technorati.com/tags/Australian>
[5] <http://technorati.com/tags/British>
[6] <http://technorati.com/tags/Group>
[7] <http://technorati.com/tags/sewer>
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[41] <http://technorati.com/tags/whether>
[42] <http://technorati.com/tags/copper>

HDTVs and a BD-Live Blu-Ray player driven by Google TV offered by Sony to the US

16/10/2010 06:51

Articles

Sony Intros the Worlds First HDTV Powered by Google TV | eHomeUpgrade[1]

Sony Internet TV & Sony Internet Blu-ray Player Revealed at NYC Event | Sony Insider[2]

My comments

The new Sony TVs and Blu-Ray player have moved from a regular Sony firmware to a firmware based on the Google TV platform with access to the Android Market. This will provide the extensibility that Google TV can provide especially when new "over-the-top" or interactive TV services come on the Internet scene.

There is no mention of any DLNA support for integration with the DLNA Home Media Network devices; but an Android app pitched at Google TV devices could solve the problem.

At the moment, these sets are only available to US market with the market-specific features such as an ATSC tuner with

CableCard support and the BD-Live Blu-Ray player only able to play DVD Region 1 and BD Region A discs. But it doesn't take long for Sony to reconfigure their TV devices for the European, Asian or Australian /New-Zealand markets by adding features that are specific to these markets .

Technorati Tags: HDTVs[3],Live[4],player[5],Google[6],Sony[7],Intros[8],Worlds[9],HDTV[10],Internet[11],Event[12],Insider[13],comments[14],platform[15],Android[16],Market[17],services[18],DLNA[19],integration[20],Home[21],Network[22],devices[23],moment[24],features[25],ATSC[26],CableCard[27],Region[28],European[29],Asian[30],Australian[31],Zealand[32],Articles[33],firmware[34]

Links

- [1] http://www.ehomeupgrade.com/2010/10/12/sony-intros-the-world-s-first-hdtv-powered-by-google-tv/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ehomeupgrade%2Fentries+%28eHomeUpgrade+1%29
- [2] <http://www.sonyinsider.com/2010/10/13/sony-internet-tv-sony-internet-blu-ray-player-revealed-at-nyc-event/>
- [3] <http://technorati.com/tags/HDTVs>
- [4] <http://technorati.com/tags/Live>
- [5] <http://technorati.com/tags/player>
- [6] <http://technorati.com/tags/Google>
- [7] <http://technorati.com/tags/Sony>
- [8] <http://technorati.com/tags/Intros>
- [9] <http://technorati.com/tags/Worlds>
- [10] <http://technorati.com/tags/HDTV>
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- [12] <http://technorati.com/tags/Event>
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- [33] <http://technorati.com/tags/Articles>
- [34] <http://technorati.com/tags/firmware>

POLL - Which network-infrastructure technology do you use on your home or small-business network?

14/10/2010 04:25

This is my first poll that I have hosted on this site and will be an open-ended poll.

NOTE; The "Category 5 Ethernet" answer doesn't count for setups where Category 5 Ethernet is just a patch cable between computers, routers and network devices.

Note: There is a poll embedded within this post, please visit the site to participate in this post's poll.

Network-infrastructure technologies don't compete but complement each other

14/10/2010 03:50

The typical way that Ethernet, HomePlug, Wi-Fi and similar network infrastructure technologies are marketed by their adherents is that they have to be the only or primary link technology for your network. This also includes the market expectation of a network-enabled device like a BD-Live Blu-Ray player having to be equipped with Wi-Fi connectivity as the preferred connection means for example. In some cases, this leads to certain technologies being sidelined when it comes to providing support for them in a network product or standard.

How I see the different infrastructure technologies is that they complement rather than compete with each other. This is because each of the different technologies have strengths and weaknesses that suit particular situations and applications.

For example, Category 5 Ethernet is able to sustain very high link speeds and bandwidths but requires new cabling to be laid. It may suit the creation of "arterial data links" as part of electrical works that are performed when you build or renovate a house or similar building. This also includes inter-building data links that are put in place when an outbuilding like a bungalow or barn is constructed or wired for electricity.

Another example is that Wi-Fi wireless networks have the inherent advantage of being wireless and working with devices that are inherently portable like laptops, tablet computers and smartphones. The main disadvantage with this technology is that it is radio-based and signal quality can suffer due to the relative position of the access point to the client device.

Yet another example is HomePlug AV which uses a building's AC wiring. This has limitations with interference generated by particular appliance types and doesn't yield the highest network speed. But it has the inherent advantage of the power outlet being a network outlet, thus allowing for increased location

flexibility for network devices without the radio-reception hassles that Wi-Fi has.

When I work out what technologies to use in a network, I would make sure I use a “new wires” and/or “no new wires” wired backbone technologies alongside one or more Wi-Fi wireless segments. For example, if I wanted to save data wiring costs on a new building or renovation by cutting back on Ethernet outlets, I would make sure that there is an Ethernet link that reaches each end of the house or between floors of a multi-storey house. As well I would then keep a pair of “homeplugs” on hand to provide wired network connectivity to parts of the house not reached by the few Ethernet outlets. This would work alongside a wireless router that is working at the network’s Internet “edge” connected to the Ethernet and HomePlug segments. This would also mean that if there isn’t adequate wireless coverage through the premises, I could deploy a wireless access point in the “dead zone” and connect it to the Ethernet or HomePlug segment as a backbone.

So this is why I would not stick with one particular network-infrastructure technology for a home network but would suggest the use of a mix of different technologies that use different media. It is also why I suggest and advocate on this site network setups that use one or more of the different technologies.

Another major change for the Intel-based PC platform will shorten the boot-up cycle

13/10/2010 14:59

News articles

Getting a Windows PC to boot in under 10 seconds | Nanotech - The Circuits Blog (CNET News)[1]

BBC News - Change to ‘Bios’ will make for PCs that boot in seconds[2]

My comments

The PC BIOS legacy

The PC BIOS which was the functional bridge between the time you turn a personal computer on and when the operating system can be booted was defined in 1979 when personal computers of reasonable sophistication came on the scene. At that time the best peripheral mix for a personal computer was a “green-screen” text display, two to four floppy disk drives, a dot-matrix printer and a keyboard. Rudimentary computers at that time used a cassette recorder rather than the floppy-disk drives as their secondary storage.

Through the 1980s, there was Improved BIOS support for integrated colour graphics chipsets and the ability to address hard disks. In the 1990s, there were some newer changes such as support for networks, mice, higher graphics and alternate storage types but the BIOS wasn’t improved for these newer

needs. In some cases, the computer had to have extra “sidecar” ROM chips installed on VGA cards or network cards to permit support for VGA graphics or booting from the network. Similarly, interface cards like SCSI cards or add-on IDE cards couldn’t support “boot disks” unless they had specific “sidecar” ROM chips to tell the BIOS that there were “boot disks” on these cards.

These BIOS setups were only able to boot to one operating environment or, in some cases, could boot to an alternative operating environment such as a BASIC interpreter that used a cassette recorder as secondary storage. If a user wanted to work with a choice of operating environments, the computer had to boot to a multi-choice “bootloader” program which was a miniature operating system in itself and presented a menu of operating environments to boot into. This was extended to lightweight Web browsers, email clients and media players that are used in some of the newer laptops for “there-and-then” computing tasks.

The needs of a current computer, with its newer peripheral types and connection methods, were too demanding on this old code and typically required that the computer take a significant amount of time from switch-on to when the operating system could start. In some cases, there were reliability problems as the BIOS had to get used to existing peripheral types being connected to newer connection methods, such as use of Bluetooth wireless keyboards or keyboards that connect via the USB bus.

The Universal Extensible Firmware Interface improvement

This is a new improvement that will replace the BIOS as the bootstrap software that runs just after you turn on the computer in order to start the operating system. The way this aspect of a computer’s operation is designed has been radically improved with the software being programmed in C rather than machine language.

Optimised for today’s computers rather than yesterday’s computers

All of the computer’s peripherals are identified by function rather than by where they are connected. This will allow for console devices such as the keyboard and the mouse to work properly if they are connected via a link like the USB bus or wireless connectivity. It also allows for different scenarios like “headless” boxes which are managed by a Web front, Remote Desktop Protocol session or similar network-driven remote-management setup. That ability has appealed to businesses who have large racks of servers in a “data room” or wiring closet and the IT staff want to manage these servers from their desk or their home network.

Another, yet more obvious benefit is for computer devices to have a quicker boot time because the new functions that UEFI allows for and that the UEFI code is optimised for today’s computer device rather than the 1979-81-era computer devices. It is also designed to work with future connection methods and peripheral types which means that there won’t be a need for “sidecar” BIOS or bootstrap chips on interface cards.

Other operational advantages

There is support in the UEFI standard for the bootstrap firmware to provide a multi-boot setup for systems that have multiple operating environments thus avoiding the need to provide a "bootloader" menu program on the boot disk to allow the user to select the operating environment. It will also yield the same improvements for those computers that allow the user to boot to a lightweight task-specific operating environment.

When will this be available

This technology has been implemented in some newer laptops and a lot of business-class servers but from 2011 onwards, it will become available in most desktop and laptop computers that appeal to home users and small-business operators. People who have their computers built by an independent reseller or build their own PCs will be likely to have this function integrated in motherboards released from this model year onwards.

Links

- [1] http://news.cnet.com/8301-13924_3-20018475-64.html?tag=nl.e703
- [2] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11430069>

What would you choose for your next touchscreen smartphone?

12/10/2010 10:28

There are now three major touchscreen smartphone platforms that are available for the choosing - what would it be.

Hi everyone!

Your mobile phone contract's up or you are about to consider moving from prepaid service to a regular mobile phone service. It's now time to consider one of those new touchscreen smartphones.

Would you go for an iPhone or one of the new platforms - the Android or the Windows Phone 7? Would you also jump carrier if your desired phone platform or handset wasn't provided by your current carrier?

Please leave a comment on this site about what you would consider choosing for your touchscreen smartphone. If you are following this site through its Facebook page, you can leave a comment on the Wall after the post.

Devolvo has raised the bar with a HomePlug AV WiFi-N access point by adding a 3-port Ethernet switch

12/10/2010 07:54

Articles

German Language

Der Devolo dLan 200 AV Wireless N organisiert Ihr Heimnetzwerk - COMPUTER BILD[1]

From the horse's mouth

Web page for this product (Deutschesprachen[2], English language[3])

My Comments

Previously, Netgear had released an 802.11n wireless access point which can connect to an Ethernet network or a HomePlug AV powerline network. This is a product that I had commented[4] on as being suitable for extending the coverage[5] of an 802.11n wireless network or establishing the footprint of your home network in to an outbuilding[6] or static caravan that you are using as part of the house.

Now, Devolo have answered Netgear's effort by releasing a similar product in the European market which also has a 3-port Ethernet switch. This unit, which sells in Germany for €109.90 has similar WiFi functionality to the Netgear unit, including WPA2 security with WPS push-button setup. As far as I know from the research I have done at Devolo's Website, this unit doesn't seem to support WPS-based quick setup for multiple-access-point wireless networks - the WPS function only works for setting up a wireless client to the access point. This function could be added to this unit through a firmware update.

The 3-port Ethernet switch would come in handy for a lounge area with an Internet-enabled TV, a Blu-Ray player and/or a games console; or an office set up in the garage or barn where there is a desktop computer and /or a network printer. It also can come in handy if you have to use this HomePlug AV access point with another HomePlug AV-Ethernet bridge to extend the coverage of your HomePlug AV powerline network to another building or caravan as I have explained here[7].

At least someone else has come up with another HomePlug AV wireless access point for the home network and have taken this concept further by adding a 3-port Ethernet switch rather than the typical Ethernet port found on this class of device.

Links

- [1] <http://www.computerbild.de/artikel/cb-News-DSL-WLAN-DSL-PowerLan-Netzwerk-Router-5644449.html>
- [2] http://www.devalo.de/consumer/77_dlan-200-av-wireless-n_starter-kit_produktovorstellung_1.html?l=de
- [3] http://www.devalo.co.uk/consumer/77_dlan-200-av-wireless-n_starter-kit_product-presentation_1.html?l=en
- [4] <http://www.computerbild.de/artikel/cb-News-DSL-WLAN-DSL-PowerLan-Netzwerk-Router-5644449.html>
- [5] <http://www.computerbild.de/artikel/cb-News-DSL-WLAN-DSL-PowerLan-Netzwerk-Router-5644449.html>
- [6] <http://www.computerbild.de/artikel/cb-News-DSL-WLAN-DSL-PowerLan-Netzwerk-Router-5644449.html>
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[7]
/2009/02/feature-article-understanding-and-managing-your-home-plug-network/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Microsoft Security Essentials—now free to small shops and offices and the like

09/10/2010 08:18

News article

Microsoft Security Essentials available to Small Businesses on October 7[1]

My comments

Microsoft have an entry-level antimalware program called Security Essentials which was previously available free to home users and students. This required all business users to consider using their premium Forefront Security Suite or other competing desktop security software solutions for their computer security.

This put small businesses and organisations like shops, medical practices, religious organisations, non-profits and the like who had a few computers on their network in a very difficult position especially when it came to easy-to-manage desktop security software. Now Microsoft have answered this need by varying the End User License Agreement for this program to allow small business users with up to 10 computers to run this program.

One of the reasons that I am pleased with this change is that it is easy for the owner of a small organisation (who is responsible for that organisation's IT) to set up and manage desktop security on Windows-based computers with this easy-to-manage program. It works in conjunction with Windows Firewall and has very little that is needed to adjust, which will please most of this kind of user who may not have good computer skills.

This therefore may be a way for a small shop or similar operation with a few Windows computers to save money on their desktop security software. One improvement I would like to see is for Apple MacOS users to benefit from a free desktop-security program because as this platform becomes popular, malware writers will target it.

Links

[1]
<http://windowsteamblog.com/windows/b/windowssecurity/archive/2010/10/06/microsoft-security-essentials-available-to-small-businesses-on-october-7.aspx>

A major update for inSSIDer

08/10/2010 09:02

News article

MetaGeek releases updated inSSIDer | SmallNetBuilder[1]

From the horse's mouth

inSSIDer 2 Preview[2] - Blog article on MetaGeek site

Download inSSIDer from here[3]!

My Comments

InSSIDer is a free but highly-capable Wi-Fi site-survey tool for use with Windows-based computers that works with any Wi-Fi network adaptor including the integrated Wi-Fi network subsystems in most laptops. I have reviewed[4] this program on this site and cited it as a preferred tool for small-business owners and householders to manage Wi-Fi networks and tune wireless routers. I have also mentioned it[5] as a piece of software you can have in your arsenal for keeping your wireless hotspot secure and free from fake "evil twin" hotspots set up to catch your customers' data.

This program has just been taken to the 2.00 version level and has had some key improvements added to it.

User-defined filters

An improvement that I am pleased with is the ability for the user to define filters that show up wireless networks that match or don't match certain criteria. A good use of this would be to determine if any access points are using your SSID and not matching other criteria like security specification or BSSID (wireless MAC address) or RSSI (signal-strength index).

Other factors you can filter on include the access point's vendor, whether it operates with 802.11n, whether it uses the 40Mhz "double-bandwidth" channels amongst other things.

Better views

There is the option to turn on a multi-colour legend view which will show up which SSIDs match particular coloured lines on the graphs. This is important in urban areas where there are many wireless networks in operation.

As well, there is the option to see a historical preview of various access point as a "sparkline" or mini-graph view when you select access points. This is useful when you determine filters based on relative signal strength or activity of particular APs.

Other functions

The same software can work with GPS devices like Bluetooth "pucks" or integrated GPS modules for mapping wireless networks. This can be useful for plotting out wireless coverage for an outdoor access point or hotzone or may be just useful for "wardrivers".

Features I would like to see

One feature I would like to see is options to make it easier to identify and filter on a multi-access-point “extended service set” so you can identify the coverage of that wireless network or “smoke out” foreign access points. This could be catered for with security credentials that are held on the host computer, whether as part of Windows Zero Configuration for accessing the network, or as a separate local database and /or the visibility of a network’s Internet gateway as determined by IP address and MAC address from the access points.

This function could be augmented with the use of multiple Wi-Fi adaptors on one computer thus improving the monitoring of an “extended service set” or a multi-band Wireless-N network.

As well, it could be a good idea to port the program to Android and other smartphone platforms so that these phones can be used as a tool for managing the wireless networks. This could include support for data capture applications where the data can be uploaded to a PC for later analysis.

Conclusion

This program is an example of a free and easy-to-use network-management program that is being made more of a tool than a toy.

Links

- [1] <http://www.smallnetbuilder.com/wireless/wireless-news/31291-metageek-releases-updated-insider>
- [2] <http://www.metageek.net/blog/inssider-2-preview>
- [3] <http://www.metageek.net/products/inssider>
- [4] /2010/04/product-review-metageek-inssider-wireless-network-analyser/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [5] /2010/04/keeping-the-wifi-public-hotspot-industry-safe/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

A feature that PowerPoint and other presentation software need – improvements for creating video and related works

07/10/2010 14:57

Introduction

Most of us who use Microsoft PowerPoint or most other business presentation software often want to use the software to make TV-quality title and graphics slides for video productions that we create with other video software, usually the software that is considered to be affordable for most users. This also includes preparing menu trees for DVD and Blu-Ray projects that are being built with affordable software. These needs will become more common as people use affordable video equipment to

prepare video material as a way of augmenting their blogs, presenting on YouTube or even exhibiting through community television broadcasters.

As well, an increasing amount of affordable consumer video playback devices such as DVD players, TVs, electronic picture frames and network media players are capable of showing JPEG images, Now many users want to be able to push these commonly-available devices in to service as cost-effective “digital signage”. This is something I have talked about in my article[1] on using DLNA-enabled equipment in the small business.

User-determined bitmap-export resolution

Most of this software doesn’t provide a way of allowing the user to have control over the resolution of the JPEG or other bitmap images that they create when the export the slides to these formats. This is a feature that I would consider being very important as I know that the presentation programs keep the graphics for each of the slides as a vector format which is drawn on the screen rather than a “raster” format which is an array of pixels. This then allows a user of these programs to make the aforementioned “TV-quality” graphics using them no matter the size of their screen.

One common situation where the user may need to adjust the resolution when exporting to JPEG is to prepare quick-loading images that are in small files for use on a device with a small display. One obvious example would be a low-end electronic picture frame which would have a small display size and another would typically be a mobile phone or portable media player with less than VGA resolution.

Another situation would eventuate in the form of a person who uses a laptop or small desktop screen with a low resolution display to create a presentation. Then they want to export the JPEG files to a playback situation capable of handling high-resolution images like a BD-Live Blu-Ray player connected via HDMI to a large direct-view screen or a projector. Similarly, the images could be used as part of a high-definition video production and there is the desire for that high-definition “crispness” in the images.

The user could be presented with a series of resolutions for the JPEG exports with these resolutions conforming to the aspect ratio for the presentations as part of exporting the images. As well, there could be the support for users to set the default image resolutions for particular aspect ratios and presentation types. The function could be simplified by use of an “SD” option for standard-definition output, an “HD1” option for 720-line high-definition output and an “HD2” option for 1080-line high-definition output.

Improved “export-to-video” and video integration

Another function worth considering would be to provide “export-to-video” functionality for animated presentations so one can make the presentations out as regular SD or HD video files with a choice of common codecs and packaging methods.

As well, in the case of Microsoft PowerPoint, this program could have integrated functionality with Windows Live Movie Maker. This free program, which is the only video-editing program that Microsoft sells, could support such functionality as “create slide

or animation in PowerPoint” so that users can prepare slides in PowerPoint then turn them in to video content using this program.

Conclusion

These kind of improvements can allow users to put business presentation software to use in improving the quality of the video or “digital signage” they create with other affordable tools.

Links

[1]
/2009/07/dlna-and-upnp-av-in-the-business/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Buyer’s Guide - Buying a laptop or notebook computer

01/10/2010 14:34

Introduction

I had previously posted a buyer’s guide about notebook and laptop computers but am providing an up-to-date version which reflects my experience with the notebook computers that I have reviewed over the last few months. It also will reflect what is part of the notebook-computer marketplace especially as the technology evolves and the cost of different specifications changes over time.

Notebook Computer Classes

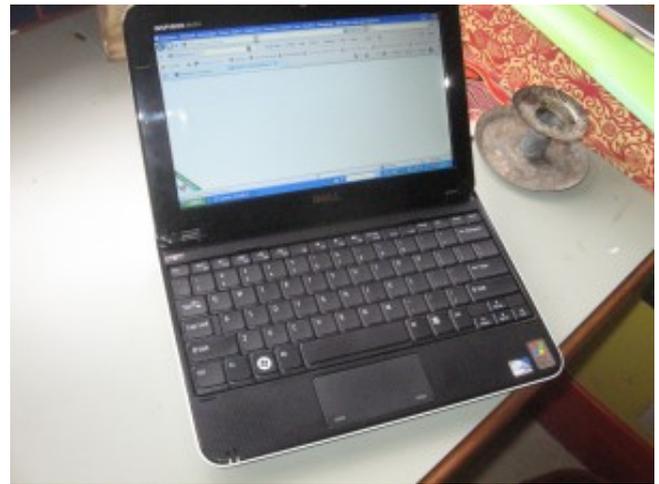
Nowadays, it is becoming harder to place a notebook computer in a distinct class because of the fact that technologies are blurring these lines of division. For example, I am starting to see that most standard notebooks and desktop replacements and even the subnotebooks are appearing with 500Gb on the hard disk and 4Gb on the RAM. As well, I am seeing netbooks start to come with 250Gb on the hard disk through this year.

Netbook

Examples: Dell Inspiron Mini 10, HP Mini series, ASUS Eee series



[1]



[2]

A netbook typically is of a small form factor, with a 10” widescreen display and works on a very low-end processor. It has a very low-capacity secondary-storage device like up to 160Gb or 250Gb for a hard disk or may use lower capacities with a solid-state storage device. The RAM memory will usually exist at 1GB at the maximum.

These machines are typically pitched as a secondary portable computer for people who do a lot of email or Web browsing “on the go” with a minimum of typing. They are also pitched for use in the home as an auxiliary computer such as in the kitchen or “Facebooking” in front of the TV.

Subnotebook /Ultraportable

Example: Dell Inspiron 13z, Apple MacBook Air series

A subnotebook or ultraportable computer is a larger computer that is typically designed for portable use and has a lot of emphasis on small size, thin profile and low weight. They may be optimised for long battery life.

Here, these computers will typically have a widescreen display of 13 to 14 inches and will have electronics optimised for low voltage operation. A lot of these machines may have a processor that has mainstream performance characteristics and will have a generous amount of primary RAM and secondary storage. The keyboard will still be large enough for you to comfortably type on and you may have a larger touchpad for navigating the screen. Some machines of this class may not have integrated optical drives and may not have high connectivity options such as a large number of USB sockets in order to allow for weight reduction.

Standard Notebook

Examples: Dell Studio 15, HP ProBook 4520, Sony VAIO E-Series, Apple MacBook Pro series



[3]



[4]

The standard notebook computer is typically of large size and has average connectivity options. It will typically have a built-in optical drive, except some units that are built on a “thin-and-light” chassis. The screen will typically be a 15” widescreen type and these units will be built on a mainstream portable-use processor platform like the Intel Core platforms. An increasing number of these machines as well as the desktop replacements will be equipped with a full-width keyboard that has a separate numeric keypad so you can enter figures quickly.



[5]

There will be entry-level units like the Compaq Presario CQ42 which may be based on a processor platform like Intel Celeron and will have less memory, hard disk space and graphics performance than most of the standard notebooks. They will be pitched at students buying their first notebook computer or parents buying a notebook for their child who is starting senior school or university.

Desktop Replacement

A desktop-replacement notebook computer will be optimised for its role as an alternative to a desktop computer. It will have a large screen and have its processor, memory and hard disk space optimised for performance. It will rate highly with connectivity but will be very heavy and not rate well for battery runtime. Some machines may not even have a battery pack and will be sold as transportable computers or “desknotes”.

There are machines that will be optimised for multimedia activities like audio, video and photo editing and will have display and sound technology optimised for this activity. On the other hand, there will be gaming notebooks that are optimised for fast-response gaming “on the go”.

Product Positioning

Consumer

Examples: HP Compaq Presario laptops, Sony VAIO E-Series laptops

A laptop positioned at consumers will typically have a design that focuses on beauty and will be optimised for multimedia. They won’t have features that support reliability or security like fingerprint scanners, theft-recovery or data-encryption software or automatic hard-disk damage-limiters. In most cases, these units may be designed in a price-conscious manner because most consumers will end up buying on price alone.

There are exceptions to this rule where some manufacturers may try newer user-interface technologies on these computers or supply computers that are optimised for performance in the gaming or multimedia context.

Business

Examples: HP ProBook laptops, Dell Vostro laptops, Lenovo ThinkPad laptops



[6]

HP ProBook 4520 Series business laptop

Most machines made for this market are typically deployed by businesses, usually large businesses who buy a large fleet of these units for use by their staff during their tenure at the business. They have a different expectation to the consumer who buys a notebook for themselves.

A notebook positioned at the business end of the market will be optimised for reliability and security. For example, there will be various security technologies like fingerprint scanners or facial-recognition scanners built in to these machines. Manufacturers will also implement technologies like “free-fall” sensing on hard disks to safeguard data from being damaged by accident.

In most cases, there will be less emphasis on beauty or multimedia capabilities because the business market tends to adopt a more serious and conservative attitude towards machines that are “for the job”. This is although manufacturers like Dell are offering customisations for their computers that include different colour trims or improved multimedia capabilities.

Premium Models - the “Black-Label” end of the market

Examples: HP Envy series, Acer Ferrari series, ASUS Lamborghini series



[7]

HP Envy 15 — an example of a premium notebook computer

An increasing number of laptop manufacturers are supplying at least one or more high-end laptop computer models that place emphasis on style and performance. The manufacturers will typically contract with a brand that is well-known for highly-desirable luxury goods to style the computer in the same image as goods associated with that brand, such as a Ferrari or Lamborghini “wet-dream” sports car. In some cases, other manufacturers, particularly those in the premium hi-fi or professional-recording scene, like B&O or Dr Dre’s “Beats” may contribute their technical know-how to a part of the computer’s functional design like its sound-reproduction capabilities.

These special computers will usually be pitched in a similar manner to luxury cars and are either for personal use or business use in a manner similar to how the company-funded executive’s car is used. Some of the machines in this class may not have the manageability and security functionality that a business notebook may have as standard but it may be worth knowing whether these feature are available as an option for that executive notebook that you are looking towards having.

These computers are worth their salt if you are considering using them for a significantly long time for both personal and /or business use but there should be a way of upgrading memory and hard-disk space on them or buying newer and better batteries later on down the track as you use them over the many years.

Questions

Do you intend to travel a lot; and how do you intend to travel?

If you do travel a lot, especially by public transport. you may have to give more focus towards portability. Here, you may have to consider either a netbook, ultraportable /subnotebook or a “thin-and-light” standard notebook.

A netbook would be appropriate if you use it for ad-hoc emailing and other communications tasks but wouldn’t be suitable for long-term work. You would also gain better value out of it if you were using it as a computer that is supplementary to your main desktop or laptop computer.

An ultraportable or “thin-and-light” standard notebook may be more suitable if you intend to do a lot of work on this machine

such as filing reports from the field. If you work with digital photos such as editing them, it may be worth looking towards a “thin-and-light” standard notebook for this work.

It is also worth investigating the possibility of opting-in higher-capacity batteries so you can obtain more run-time on the machine while you travel, especially by public transport. This is because not all public-transport options will provide access to ready power for charging.

Most standard laptops like the Dell Studio 15 may work well for those of you whose main travelling option is to pack the computer in to the boot (trunk) of your car. You won't have to worry about carrying it around all of the time.

Do you use a desktop computer as your main computer?

You can place a lot of emphasis on portability and get away with lesser processor, RAM and hard-disk specifications if your are running a desktop computer or high-end laptop as your main computer. But you will need to make sure you have good network-connectivity options, preferably Ethernet as well as wireless so you can easily and quickly “check-out” data files from your main computer.

On the other hand, if you intend to use your notebook as your sole computing device, you should look towards performance, screen size, connectivity and hard-disk capacity as key deciding factors for your computer. This also includes those people who prefer to buy a notebook computer over a desktop for their home computer because they have a small living space, prefer to stow it away when it's not in use or want to move towards the “new computing environment”.

Application guidelines

These guidelines may sound too “pie in the sky” especially for small-business or consumer buyers who are used to buying the cheapest equipment available. But it is worth paying a bit extra for a machine that will cost less in the long run and have a long service life.

Student's first notebook

If you are thinking of buying your child who is doing Year 11–12 (senior school /Form 5–6) secondary or tertiary (university, college (US) or TAFE) study their first laptop, you have to be sure not to short-change them. This advice may go against the commonly-accepted thought pattern of buying the cheapest laptop for a student because they may be more likely to damage the computer.

This class of students will use these computers for preparing their coursework that is part of their studies alongside online communications (email, social networks and instant messaging /Skype), games and multimedia such as being a jukebox for parties. They will be taking this machine between home, school /college and friends' locations either by public transport, your car, a friend's car or their first car which would most likely be a very old car which is likely to be very worn-out.

The processor, RAM and display subsystem are also of concern for all students, especially those whose work is graphically intensive, such as a design-based course or subjects that make heavy use of graphics or multimedia. This makes the machine

more useable by the student because they don't have to be waiting around for a task to complete on the computer.

The best choice for this class of user would be a standard notebook. Here, I would prefer for them to use a low-end business model, but with the highest-capacity hard disk that you can afford. The reason I would specify this is because the business models are pitched for reliability under the kind of abuse a student might dish at it such as frequent transporting, old cars with half-dead suspensions, perpetual party life and the like. I also specify the highest-capacity hard disk you can afford because there will have to be room for studies, digital pictures, MP3s and the like that will fill up the hard disk very quickly.

If cost is a real issue to you, you may find that refurbished or rebuilt ex-business computers may offer the right kind of value for this class of user. These would be available either online or through independent laptop specialists and these resellers would buy the older computers from large businesses or government departments who are upgrading their computer fleet on a regular basis or buy end-of-lease equipment from computer financiers. Then these dealers refurbish or rebuild the equipment before reselling it. With these deals, it may be worth finding out whether there are newer batteries available for these computers and /or whether they can upsize the hard disks in the computers to larger capacities. Similarly, you may have to raise the issue of whether you can buy an up-to-date version of the operating system and /or office software with the refurbished computer.

Blogger or journalist

This class of user will want to type wherever they are, such as when they are flying. They will also be needing to keep large amounts of data such as manuscripts or, nowadays, photos and video footage. As well, they need to be able to see the screen properly so they can edit their copy easily.

Here, a 13” ultraportable that can fit on the economy-class airline tray table, may work well for these users but they may have to investigate the possibility of buying extra power options like an “extra-power” battery when they do a lot of long-haul flights. In some cases, it may be worth looking towards a business-oriented ultraportable and use the security software on these units if they do a lot of controversial work such as reporting assignments in police states.

Work-home laptop for small business operator

If your laptop is going to be the “work-home” computer for your small business and you don't have a computer at your small business, I would suggest a standard notebook or desktop-replacement computer. Here, these machines will have the performance that you need for your business life and enough storage capacity for your home and business life. Small-business users shouldn't pass off the business-class notebooks and may find themselves benefiting from the features offered by this class of computer.

Moving towards the “new computing environment”

If you intend to move your home computing environment away from the desktop computer towards a laptop or notebook computer, it may be worth looking towards a computer which rates well on capacity and performance. This could lead to a mainstream consumer-rated standard notebook or low-end business notebook. Business users should move towards a mainstream business notebook if they want to move to the “new computing environment”.

On the other hand, if you want close-to-desktop functionality, it may be worth looking towards a mainstream business or multimedia notebook. Some of the premium-end computers could also suit this kind of user.

Secondary portable computer for a desktop user or regular notebook user

A 10” netbook could be useful as a secondary portable computer for emailing and other ad-hoc activities. On the other hand, if you do a lot of “typing up” on the go or do value a larger screen, you could go for a 13”-14” ultraportable computer because of its larger screen and keyboard. An alternative option may be a 14”-15” low-specification standard notebook. The hard-disk capacity may not matter much to this kind of use because you are likely to transfer the files from the secondary computer to the primary computer whenever you arrive at home or the office or transfer work-in-progress files to the secondary computer so you can work on them.

Here, you would have to make sure your secondary computer does well for connectivity especially as you are likely to connect it to your primary computer in order to transfer files. Here, you may have to make sure you have up-to-date networking requirements and at least a few USB ports so you can use memory keys as a backup measure.

Conclusion

The bottom line that you think of when buying that laptop computer is to factor what you are using it for and how you are using it so you can avoid shortchanging yourself by buying a unit that doesn’t meet your current needs or buying a machine that won’t see you through the long haul.

Links

- [1] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/HP-Mini-210-open.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [2] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/2010-06-01-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [3] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-20-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [4] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Dell-Studio-15-laptop.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [5] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/2010-06-23-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

- [6] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/2010-05-31-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [7] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/2010-04-23-004.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Increase in competition in the touchscreen smartphone market

01/10/2010 08:35

Nokia N8

Nokia N8 shipments begin, ushers in Symbian^3 era - Engadget [1]

Nokia N8 shipping - Units mailed out to pre-order customers | RegHardware.co.uk (United Kingdom)[2]

Microsoft Windows Phone 7

Microsoft prepping Windows Phone 7 for an October 21st launch? (update: US on Nov. 8?) | Engadget[3]

Windows Phone 7 sortira bien le 21 octobre | Businessmobile.fr (France - French language)[4]

Microsoft: Windows Phone 7 kommt am 21. Oktober | netzwelt.de (Germany - German language)[5]

Microsoft bestätigt Starttermin von Windows Phone 7 | derStandard.at (Austria - German language)[6]

My comments

Over September and October 2010, there is increased activity concerning competing touchscreen-smartphone platforms. This will definitely make Apple squirm even

The first one will be the Nokia N8 with its Symbian 3 operating system, which will be a way of keeping Nokia users loyal to the Nokia N-Series phones with the Symbian platform. This platform is shipping now and most of the European mobile-phone operators are likely to have the various contracts worked out for these phones by October.

The second one will be the Microsoft Windows Phone 7 which is intended to be launched in the European market by 21 October. At the moment, HTC have worked out various models for this platform

These phones will use a “windowed” UI on their home screen so it is easier to go to particular functions at a touch rather than working with a list or scattered widgets on the home screen as what Android or iOS (iPhone) do.

There is a question that I have yet to hear an answer about with

the Symbian 3 or the Windows Phone 7. It is whether developers will have greater freedom to develop apps for these platforms and whether there are many paths available for provisioning the software to the phones. This includes whether the app stores can charge for the software through the mobile-phone provider's billing system for post-paid services as well as through credit cards or vouchers as is the current practice with the iTunes App Store.

Similarly, there is the issue of whether a person can download an app to a regular computer and upload it to the phone via the local network or through a USB or Bluetooth tethered connection. This practice may be useful for people who are provisioning software to employees for example; or installing /updating a "mobile component" app as part of the installation procedure for a piece of hardware or software.

It will then be interesting in a year to see which of the companies will "own" particular touchscreen-smartphone markets such as the consumer market, small-business-user market and "enterprise /corporate" market.

Links

[1]

<http://www.engadget.com/2010/09/30/nokia-n8-shipments-begin/>

[2] http://www.reghardware.com/2010/09/30/nokia_n8/

[3]

<http://www.engadget.com/2010/09/26/microsoft-prepping-windows-phone-7-for-an-october-21st-launch/>

[4]

<http://www.businessmobile.fr/mobile/actualites/0,3800005740,39754995,00.htm>

[5]

<http://www.netzwelt.de/news/84195-microsoft-windows-phone-7-kommt-21-oktober.html>

[6]

<http://derstandard.at/1285199553659/Microsoft-bestaetigt-Starttermin-von-Windows-Phone-7>
