



PORT NETWORKS

PRESS RELEASE

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PORT NETWORKS SOLVES MARINA WI-FI ISSUES WITH FIRST INTEGRATED MARINE WIRELESS BRIDGE

Baltimore, MD - May 11, 2006 – The number of marinas offering wireless Internet access is exploding, but many boat owners are frustrated by the difficulty of connecting to those networks using Wi-Fi gear that was designed for use inside a home. Addressing that problem, Port Networks has just released the world's first integrated Marine Wireless Bridge, a Wi-Fi device designed specifically for those who want to get online while they're afloat.

The company's new product, known as the MWB-200, is a high-powered wireless client that sits above-deck and connects to one or more computers through a single network cable. Because of its unique design, the MWB-200 has 16 times the signal strength of an ordinary Wi-Fi adapter, and can move data back and forth at up to 54 megabits per second.

"We came to see the need for this device while we were installing custom wireless systems in high-end yachts," says Hugh Bethell, the General Manager at Port Networks. "We realized that off-the-shelf Wi-Fi components weren't the right solution for connecting to an access point on the other side of a marina, so we set out to develop a durable, affordable alternative that any boat owner could use."

Common Wi-Fi Problems

Typically, boat owners with a laptop computer on board try to make use of their computer's built-in Wi-Fi capability, but soon discover that they can't maintain a reliable connection. This is usually due to two common limitations of built-in Wi-Fi adapters: they transmit at low power (to preserve battery life) and they lack external antennas. Though they may work well when connecting to an access point in the same room, they rarely have the range to perform adequately in a marina.

Those with desktop computers or older laptops often add Wi-Fi to their systems through a USB adapter. While convenient and inexpensive, these products are also limited in range, because they draw their power from the limited current available through a computer's USB port.

"We've searched for a USB Wi-Fi adapter with suitable range," says Bethell, "but ultimately we've concluded that the limitations in their signal strength offset the convenience of their installation."

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For those with sufficient funds, one answer to the limitations of built-in and USB-powered Wi-Fi adapters is to install a custom system featuring an omni antenna mounted above-deck, connected to a stand-alone wireless device wired into the boat's electrical system. These systems deliver greatly improved performance, but in addition to the time and expense of installation, they come with significant signal loss.

"Every foot of coaxial cable in between a radio and its antenna introduces signal loss," says Carl Peterson, Network Manager at Port Networks, "and Wi-Fi systems suffer from signal loss as much as VHF, SSB, and other radios do."

The Port Networks Solution

While designing the MWB-200, the staff at Port Networks focused on three principles: keep the radio close to its antenna (to maximize signal strength), make the unit weatherproof (so it could be deployed above-deck), and eliminate the power cord (for safety and convenience).

What they came up with is an integrated unit that houses a high-power transmitter in a watertight, shatterproof case. Attached to the case are a hardened, 5.5dB omni-directional antenna and a watertight cable terminal. The unit comes with a 25-foot network cable (longer cables are also available) that runs into the cabin and connects to a small power injector. The injector transforms 110-volt AC into 48-volt DC, and delivers that power to the transmitter over the network cable.

Connecting a computer to the MWB-200 is as easy as plugging a standard network cable in between the Ethernet port on the computer and the Ethernet port on the power injector. The computer doesn't have to have its own Wi-Fi adapter, or any other special hardware. The Marine Wireless Bridge does all the work, delivering the Internet to the computer just as if the computer were plugged into the wall at an office.

The MWB-200 has several advantages over built-in Wi-Fi, USB adapters, and custom systems:

- **16x More Transmit Power.** Because it incorporates a powerful transmitter and an above-deck antenna, and eliminates any signal loss from a long cable run, the MWB-200 has far more range than most other Wi-Fi solutions.
- **Flexible Mounting.** The MWB-200 doesn't require a custom installation; in fact, it can be stowed below while under way, and simply placed on deck when a boat is within range of a Wi-Fi network. Thanks to its built-in Power-Over-Ethernet technology, a single network cable is the only connection it requires.
- **Advanced Networking Features.** Unlike most Wi-Fi adapters, the Marine Wireless Bridge is a stand-alone device on the network, so it includes its own internal DHCP server and a Site Survey utility for detecting available wireless networks, and it supports advanced encryption, including WEP64, WEP128, 802.1x, WPA-TKIP, WPA2-AES & WPA-Mixed.
- **High-Speed Data Transfer.** The MWB-200 is compatible with both 802.11b and 802.11g access points, so it will work almost anywhere Wi-Fi is available, and it will deliver throughput of up to 54 megabits per second.

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A Growing Market

In developing the MWB-200, Port Networks has aimed to serve the expanding ranks of cruisers, liveaboards, and other boat owners who carry one or more computers with them. As computer-based navigational systems have become more readily available, and wireless networks have allowed boat owners to send and receive email from ports around the world, many boat owners have come to regard an onboard computer as standard equipment.

According to the Boat Owners Association of the United States (BOATUS), more than 190,000 of their more than 600,000 members have bought marine related software specifically for use on their boats, and 565,000 of those members own and use computers.

Pricing & Availability

The MWB-200 is currently available at an introductory price of \$349.00. That price includes the above-deck unit, power injector, configuration system, and 25-foot network cable. A 50-foot network cable is available for an additional \$20, and custom cable assemblies can also be ordered.

Port Networks will be selling its Marine Wireless Bridge directly to consumers through telephone and online sales. The company's website is located at <http://store.portnetworks.com>, and its toll-free sales number is 877-4PN-WIFI (877-476-9434).

About Port Networks

Port Networks is a privately-held wireless equipment developer and Internet service provider, located in Baltimore, MD. The company was founded in 2003 and serves customers in the marine, residential, and commercial markets.

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