

Going WiFi

Building your own wireless network

By Alice Hill

My favorite early home-networking product was "LAN in a Can," which gave home users a basic peer-to-peer network nearly a decade before Napster made the term "peer-to-peer" cool. But there was no market for it, and it bombed. Today, the wired home is more likely to contain one if not two PCs, a printer and possibly a laptop borrowed from the office—yet few people know how relatively painless it is now to set up a wireless network. If you want to make a little extra cash this summer, or upgrade your dial-up digs at home, read on.

The next trend in home networking is the wireless LAN—or "WiFi." No one wants to run cable between rooms and add new wall jacks to share a few files, so wireless is the smarter alternative. To succeed where previous products failed, the WiFi home network not only enables multiple PCs to share files and printers, it also supports multiple and simultaneous Internet connections, including broadband cable or DSL. That means Dad can be checking his online portfolio on his laptop while you and a friend play a little multiplayer Quake III. Try that with LAN in a Can!

What's in a Standard?

Get the propeller hat on for this next part. The official WiFi standard is called 802.11b—small wonder someone came up with snappier-sounding WiFi instead. Apple pioneered 802.11b, then it was adopted by Toshiba and Compaq. It's likely to be widely used in businesses.

To get that power into the home, Lucent technologies recently unveiled an 802.11b line of products called the Orinoco Residential Gateway (wavelan.com/products/product_detail.html?id=29) specifically for broadband connections. An Orinoco setup will run you about \$400 for a desktop and laptop kit, and you can buy components at www2.warehouse.com/kiosk/Lucent/default.asp?source=xLucent.

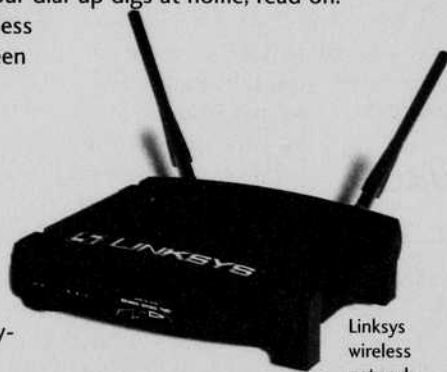
Linksys, known for great inexpensive home routers (wires required) has a new wireless network for broadband connections that also adds a firewall for security. You can pick up a Linksys solution for under \$500 at provantage.com/scripts/go.dll. For Mac users, Apple has the Airport, a futuristic-looking wireless transceiver that delivers 11Mbps of networking power up to 150 feet away. Developed in conjunction with Lucent, an Airport hook-up runs about \$299 (\$99 for the laptop card version).

Plug and Go

Setting up a WiFi LAN is fairly simple. You connect your cable modem or DSL line to the transceiver, plug the transceiver into your PC's USB port, and then add a transceiver to every PC in the home. Laptops use a PC Card version and can roam freely throughout the house and even into the yard.

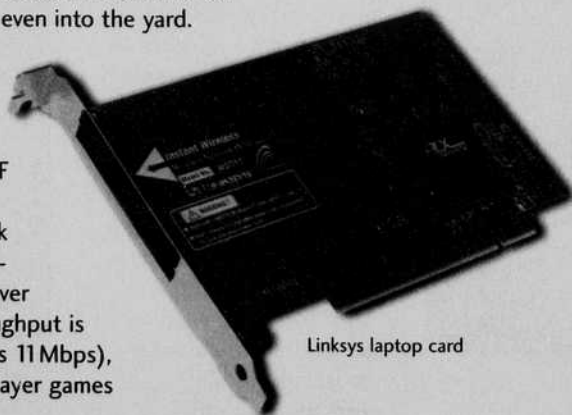
Connections are always on and always high speed, no matter what PC you're using or where.

If your budget is tight, or you have a dial-up connection, a wireless RF (radio frequency) network may be the ticket. Intel's AnyPoint Wireless network will work with dial-up connects or high-speed DSL or cable modem. A transceiver costs about \$100 (intel.com). Throughput is slower (1.5Mbps as compared to WiFi's 11Mbps), but it's still fast enough to play multiplayer games and access MP3s all over the house. •



Linksys wireless network

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Linksys laptop card

Coldplay

Parachutes

(Nettwerk America)

With *Parachutes*, their first album, arriving somewhat belatedly on these shores (it was released in their native England last July, where it debuted at No. 1), Coldplay now has to face an American audience. Two principal Yank objections to the London-based quartet are likely: 1) They're merely the latest band to be megahyped by the notoriously overenthusiastic U.K. music press, and 2) their sound is slavishly imitative of two Brit influences du jour, Jeff Buckley and Radiohead.

Re: objection number one, well, sometimes those crazy English adjective-mongers can be right, and this time they are—Coldplay is very good indeed. As for objection number two, yes, the spacey guitar tones of Chris Martin and Jonny Buckland do recall Radiohead's *The Bends* and *OK Computer*, and there's more than a hint of Buckley in Martin's tremulous vocals on tracks like "Shiver" and "High Speed." But let's be fair: His nasal timbre is just as capable of evoking Dave Matthews ("Yellow"), Beck ("Don't Panic"), and even, on quieter moments like "Spies" and "Everything's Not Lost," the spirit of the late Nick Drake. In truth, Coldplay is their own band. Predominantly acoustic but not afraid to rock, partial to melancholy drift but buoyed by graceful melodies, their sound may not be unique, but once you've heard it, chances are you'll want to hear it again and again. —Mac Randall

