EVENT TECHNOLOGY REPORT
EM DOWNLOADS THE INDUSTRY'S TOP TECH TOOLS
THIS MONTH: WIRELESS INTERNET

Every conversation in the event marketing industry eventually comes around to technology. You want to know what tools are out there to make your jobs easier, make your programs more successful and most crucially, make your target consumers love you the most. We have heard your clarion calls for help and now, with this monthly series, EM's own Ken Briodagh will collect and codify the hottest, newest, most interesting, best (and sometimes worst) technological doohickeys available to you. We'll even rate them for you on a scale of 👍👍👍👍 ("Skip it") to 👍👍👍👍👍 ("Do it now").

AirMagnet

We're starting with the big player. AirMagnet is for the geekiest and, therefore, best people on your IT staff to get excited about. These guys *are* the industry standard when it comes to wifi network solutions. This equipment handles security, site survey, electromagnetic spectrum analyses, frequency evaluation and helps you make all the balls roll into the pockets you want them in.
Who: Fluke
Cost: OK, here's the catch, right up top. At least $15,000 to own everything you're gonna need. But… that's really not too bad when you look into renting inferior stuff from a venue.
What's Involved: I'll try and keep this as plain as I can. AirMagnet provides full-time automated analysis of all wifi traffic, channels, devices, their connection state and spectrum analysis of non-WiFi devices and sources of interference. All on your laptop.
Why you care: Ask your IT guy, but in short, it lets you get to causes of problems with a network, and fix them, rather than simply chasing symptoms every time someone says, "I lost my signal in the third stall from the door? WHY?"
Score: 👍👍👍👍👍 (This is the best. And the cost is worth it, if you care about your wifi, and you do, we hope.)

Wi-Spy and Chanalyzer

So you don't want to drop $15k for the full bear on your first trip out. OK. I get it. Enter Chanalyzer and Wi-Spy. These two products combine to do about 80 percent of what AirMagnet can do, and for a much friendlier price point. Just remember that if you get into huge, heavy-duty high-density use (like more than a few thousand simultaneous users), you might be reconsidering your thrift. That's not to take anything away from these excellent products. They have a lot going for them:
Who: metageek
What: Wi-Spy is a portable USB spectrum analyzer with a high-resolution enhanced amplitude range that allows you to identify interference in the 900 MHz, 2.4 GHz, or 5 GHz public ISM bands (that's almost everything that can cause you trouble). Chanalyzer is a suite of software that monitors your networks and turns the data that the Wi-Spy collects into easy-to-read and analyze charts so you can identify problems and crush them.
Cost: Wi-Spy will run you up to about $600 for the top of the line and Chanalyzer Pro is about $500, and since you need both, you're looking at about $1,100 for the top-end line. Not bad.
Score: 👍👍👍👍 (Like we said, 80 percent of the function, at six percent of the price. Nice.)

Xirrus

These guys are basically the best of the best when it comes to high-density wireless coverage. Got a 3,000-seat keynote hall jam-packed and your speaker tells them ALL to visit YouTube at the same time? If you've deployed Xirrus systems, you'll be covered. We'll tell you how, but first, the facts:

Components: Dense modular access points (AP), directional antennas, distributed intelligence

Cost: Expensive. But you get what you pay for, folks.

How it works: Basically, your users will depend on high-density bandwidth for voice, video and data to and from mobile devices, and the traditional methods just cannot handle the volume of users and data that attendees demand these days. The best way to deploy wireless is multiple radios and directional antennas. So that's what Xirrus does. Its multi-AP solution is powerful, scalable and fairly easy to set up.

Why you care: Because you, like every other event organizer and brand out there, are sick of having your wireless coverage be the black memory your attendees take home from your event.

Score: 👍👍👍👍 (Xirrus is an industry leader. All the big tech brands are using Xirrus equipment, and if you want to be in that league, you should, too. The price point is the only thing holding this back from a perfect score.)

Almond

This one is brand-new, unveiled at CES this year. It's a router, with a built-in touch screen for configuration and set-up. Basically, it cuts the computer out of the equation, letting the routers be stand-alone units. It's not even available yet, really, so we don't know how much it'll cost. We'll get you the rest of the intel you need, but first, the facts:

Provider: Securifi

Big benefit: The folks at Securifi claim it's a super-secure solution because it ships with the security-shaky WPS system disabled and gives users the chance to select a timed enable that is supposed to give just enough time to connect to the router, then disable automatically in order to increase wireless security.

Downside: Hard to say, since nobody's using it yet. The touch screen is troublesome though... what if it breaks?

Score: 👍👍 (There are still just too many variables here. We don't know cost, reliability or signal and bandwidth strength. We'll have to wait and see. There's potential for coolness, though.)

Trade Show Internet

These guys have a pretty unique idea. If you hook up with TSI, they will handle your wifi needs by shipping you a rented box of gear: routers, antennas, cable drops. Sort of the Zipcar method of wifi deployment. It's designed for small deployments, not high-density use, but it's so mobile that that might not matter. And there's power there. In fact, if you were at the 2012 Event Marketing Summit, and you used the wifi in the Exhibit Hall, you can thank TSI's networks. We'll give you the details, but first, the facts:

Cost: There are a few trim levels, but for the 4G (read: fast) connection, you'll pay about $1,000 per week, or $500 for three days.

What is it: The internet kit rental contains everything you need to get up to four computers online, per kit, on a 3G or 4G signal. The signal's strong enough for web surfing, checking email, and doing software demos. It provides a wired connection, too.

How to use it: It's a plug and play kind of thing and takes about two minutes to get going, TSI says. The kit or kits arrive at the venue via FedEx one business day prior to your event and a prepaid FedEx return label will be included.

Score: 👍👍 (Well, it's neat and easy, if you're dealing with small-capacity events or just one booth at a trade show— but it's so expensive and limited in capacity, it's just not cost-effective or powerful enough for any enterprise-level event.)