

NETWORKWORLD

Cisco Spectrum Expert

I consider a Wi-Fi spectrum analyzer to be an essential tool for every consultant and every enterprise installation of any size. A spectrum analyzer isn't a traditional datascop or packet analyzer – rather, it's a way of seeing energy in a radio channel in an effort to verify configuration and to identify sources of interference. My choice has always been [Cisco's Spectrum Expert](#), which is also available in a similar form from Fluke, under their AirMagnet brand. This product is comprehensive and yet very easy to use, even for non-engineers. The interface is intuitive, and the range of function includes the ability to customize the display to exactly what is needed in a given situation.

I use Spectrum Expert for benchmarking projects to make sure the playing field is indeed level, for debugging suspected performance or coverage issues, and to do post-installation site surveys. I wouldn't be without it. Of course, there are less expensive products available, with a bit less functionality, and many of these are good substitutes especially where funds are limited. But Spectrum Expert is the flagship of enterprise-grade spectrum analyzers, and it's always in my toolbag wherever I might roam.

2. zBoost Cell Phone Signal Extender from Wi-Ex

I've been working in wireless for almost 19 years. I have five – or is it six? – wireless LANs in my house. I've used hundreds of wireless and mobile products, spoken and written widely on the subject, and generally been a cheerleader for everything wireless – but I have a deep, dark, secret: I have terrible wireless coverage at my house.

Now, this isn't my fault. I've lived in this house for almost 24 years, and I'm only a KM or so from the Mass Pike – the big east/west toll road that runs the length of the state. You'd think cellular would be just fine here. And yet service is marginal with all of the four major carriers – a bar or two at best. The second floor is a great place to make a call, but the office is in the basement. Dropped calls are common.

Anyone in this situation has a limited number of options. You can try multiple handsets. You can call your preferred carrier and ask (or even plead), but even those of us with some visibility have no sway of value here. You can go up to the second floor.

Or you can get the dual-band, voice and data zBoost Cell Phone Signal Extender from Wi-Ex. This is a low-cost repeater, perfectly legal, mind you, that adds a couple of bars to the signals of all of the carriers. For best results, you'll need to do a little installing, ideally mounting the included cable-attached antenna some distance from the base unit, which itself is about the size of a Wi-Fi access point. But no configuration beyond that is required - switch it on, and enter cell phone coverage nirvana.



Networks.



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