

Improving mobile phone signal in your home or office

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Geek Life

By Andrew Robulack

Rather than juggle the cost and hassle of multiple phone bills, most of us are dumping Ye Olde Landline in favour of pocket-friendly mobile phones.

Unfortunately, it can sometimes be a challenge to use these devices in our homes and offices because of a weak signal from distant or hidden cell towers.

Lucky for us, then, there's are things called "cellphone signal boosters."

This device, which looks like a WiFi base station, acts like a miniature cellphone tower that you can plug in at your house or office to boost your local cellphone signal.

Over the last few months in Whitehorse I've had a couple of friends trying out a loaner cellphone signal booster called the zBoost from Wi-Ex. Both friends live in that densely populated suburb called Riverdale, where cellphone signal is notoriously awful.

(But you can get five bars of 3G signal way out at Helen's Fish Camp on Lake Laberge - what's up with that?)

During our tests we learned that there are primarily two challenges in receiving and boosting cellphone signal.

The first is geographical. If there's very little or no cell signal outside of your home or business, a cellphone signal booster won't have any effect on delivering signal inside.

The second challenge is all about walls and ceilings.

Cell signals have difficulty penetrating stuff, especially when it's dense, and especially if the signal has already travelled a fair distance.

This is where the zBoost becomes very effective. This thing is really good at making an existing cellphone signal stronger. And it can carry that improved signal into a house or office so you get better call quality and higher data rates.

One friend who tested the zBoost lives on that stretch of Alsek that curves into the deepest recess of the cellphone signal shadow cast by Grey Mountain.

There's literally no signal at all in the general vicinity of his home.

All the same, he went to great trouble with the zBoost to try and make it work, installing its antennae on the roof of his house.

Unfortunately, it was to no avail. The zBoost wasn't able to create a cell signal where there was none to begin with.

Meanwhile, just down a bit further on Pelly Road, I have another friend who lives in a basement suite, just on the edge of that infamous Grey Mountain shadow.

She gets reasonable signal outside of her house: a bar or two.

But inside her digs, the signal is gone.

This friend wasn't quite as thorough with her installation of the zBoost antennae. She just sort of nailed it up on the side of the house above her window.

In fact, her installation was entirely inconsistent with the product's instructions. (Which, admittedly, I neglected to pass on to her.)

The unit we were testing, called the SOHO, requires 15 feet of vertical separation between the antennae and the base station.

In my friend's case, there was about five.

But it still worked brilliantly for her.

With just a few minutes of ad hoc installation she had a full five bars of signal in her basement suite.

Oddly, though, she no longer seems to be receiving my calls or texts.

I'm assuming that's less a technical issue than it is related to the fact that I'm trying to get the zBoost back from her for return to the folks at Wi-Ex.

I know that a lot of people put off cancelling their landline phone and committing fully to their mobile because they have poor signal reception in their home or office.

The zBoost clearly resolves this problem. As long as you have signal outside, you can bring it inside with a zBoost, and make it stronger.

The zBoost can support multiple devices simultaneously. And because it boosts signal, it extends your mobile device's battery life.

If you live or work in a place where an external antennae is impractical, there's a zBoost unit called the Metro which just needs to be placed in a window.

The zBoost SOHO sells for \$400 (the rough equivalent of eight months of landline service), and the Metro goes for \$300.

You can learn more about them at <http://www.wi-ex.com>.

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