

Table of Contents

A Step, Not A Standard 1

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[IMAGE] The LocustWorld MeshAP is an 'out of the box' solution to the problem of setting up a community wireless network. To date it's the only one we know of that focuses on providing community access in line with the general objectives of the Consume initiative.

The box itself is simple. It's a VIA MiniITX based machine, with a small case, PCI riser, D-Net wireless card, and a CompactFlash card which acts as the 'disk' for the unit. This is all off-the-shelf hardware and the bill of materials is no big secret – roll on open source.

These machines boot a small Linux distribution which uses the AODV (Ad hoc On Demand Distance Vector) routing protocol to set up links between other machines running MeshAP in the local area. Discovery and setup is fairly automatic. There is a graphical interface, but it would be good to see serial port functionality out of the box, as this would enable these machines to be remotely managed without a monitor/keyboard.

It is good to see an attempt being made to bring wireless to the masses at relatively low cost, but as far as interoperability and standards go, there is much work to be done – and underway – within the commercial research community. While MeshAP represents an excellent step forward, it should be seen as just one step in the direction of a wireless world, rather than the de facto standard.

The outcome of research projects such as Project Monarch at Carnegie-Mellon University is likely to determine the direction taken by the industry at large, as is the uptake of Intel's Centrino technology, which may well kill off some of the key players in the 802.11 silicon space.

While we wait for the commercial world to catch up, though, MeshAP is definitely worth a look, and some experimentation.

LocustWorld [<http://www.locustworld.com>]

Consume [<http://www.consume.net>]

Project Monarch [<http://www.monarch.cs.cmu.edu>]

Intel Centrino [<http://www.intel.com/products/mobiletechnology/>]