

Caterpillar Helps Wi-Fi Networks Fly

Berkeley Varitronics Systems Releases Frequency & Power Measurement Analyzer

by Joseph Pasquini

AS WLAN TECHNOLOGY continues to make its presence known across the enterprise, the complexity of wireless communication highlights the need for extensive functionality testing. Intended for use by network and test engineers or interested network administrators, Berkeley Varitronics Systems has introduced Caterpillar, a low-cost handheld frequency and power analysis meter designed for 802.11a, 802.11b, and 802.11g networks.

With the Caterpillar, technicians can measure RF power from any 802.11 network device

equipped with an external antenna connection. The receiver can attach directly to a WAP, bridge, or NIC using the included SMA antenna connection kit. "It can be used as a verification tool to make sure that hundreds or thousands of AP's all fall into their advertised specs before or after they are installed into the network environment," says Craig Schober, media director for Berkeley. In addition, the portable sweep- ing analyzer will also measure similar wireless devices including Bluetooth, Zigbee, cordless phones, VoIP devices, and video transmitters.

The Caterpillar, which measures both the ISM and U-NII

frequency bands, features the ability to instantly verify and analyze output power levels, report their channel and frequency, and create 802.11 power profiles from any access point in real time. Users can also select power level triggering thresholds. The supported frequency ranges are 2,400MHz to 2,500MHz and 5,100MHz to 5,900MHz. The power measurement range is from 0dBm to 30dBm, with 1dB steps. The device also features a built-in 128 x 64 blue graphic backlit LCD display.

The 2-pound handheld unit is powered by four removable AA Ni-MH rechargeable batteries which, according to Berkeley,



SNAPSHOT

Berkeley Varitronics Systems
Caterpillar

\$750

Portable WLAN power and frequency
measurement device

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provide a DC run time of up to six hours. Four extra batteries, a charger, and an external DC transformer are also included, as is a water-resistant, high impact ABS plastic carrying case.

The included antenna connection kit is composed of a 12-inch RG316 cable with SMA male to SMA female connectors, a 12-inch RG316 cable with SMA male to TNC female connectors, and a 6-inch semirigid cable with SMA male to N-Type male connectors. Each of the three patch cables interfaces directly between the analyzer's 50-ohm SMA female connection and the host to be tested.

The Caterpillar faces competition in the handheld analyzer market space from some robust offerings such as the Anritsu MS2721A, the Boonton Electronics 4230A, and the Bantam Instruments Model 425A. Thanks to the focused feature set of the Caterpillar, however, Berkeley is able to directly offer the analyzer well below the pricing of its competitors, which usually starts at \$1,000 and up. Earlier this year Berkeley released the Butterfly WLAN power meter, which appears similar to the Caterpillar but only measures RF output. ■