

Stay Clear of Uncertified Wireless LAN Products

The Wi-Fi Alliance plans to certify wireless LAN equipment based on the forthcoming 802.11g standard. Uncertified 802.11g products carry large risks. Gartner recommends waiting for certification, which will likely occur by the end of 2003.

Event: On 25 February 2003, the Wi-Fi Alliance, a non-profit organization that certifies the interoperability of Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) 802.11 wireless LAN equipment, announced plans for the certification of products based on the 802.11g addition to the 802.11 wireless LAN standard. Certification testing of 802.11g products will begin after the IEEE has approved the final standard.

First Take: Wireless LANs are a high-growth area for enterprise networking, and a battle among vendors for market share has led to sales of pre-standard, uncertified 802.11g products. But pre-standard products come with many worries. The risks include interoperability and performance problems in a multivendor environment, particularly with certified 802.11b products installed in PCs in a mixed 802.11b and 802.11g operating environment. Gartner believes enterprises should buy only certified products, or risk interoperability and performance problems.

The alliance's statement emphasizes the need to wait. The alliance has positioned itself for the relatively rapid testing and certification of products after the standard is complete, likely in mid-2003. Thus, Gartner expects certified 802.11g products will become available in 4Q03.

Gartner believes enterprises should use 802.11b equipment but not pay anything above 802.11b prices for uncertified 802.11b/802.11g products. These products may not meet the certification criteria for 802.11g operation. All 802.11g implementations are proprietary, so we also recommend that enterprises for now stay away from them. Turn off any 802.11g functions at the Access Point. However, 802.11g should mature toward the end of 2003 and will likely become available in 802.11a/802.11g combinations in late 2003 or early 2004. Their appearance will not make 802.11b implementations obsolete.

Analytical Source: Ian Keene, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "802.11g: A New Wireless Networking Standard" — 802.11g provides the next step for wireless LANs in the 2.4 GHz band, supporting backward compatibility with 802.11b and a high-speed mode using OFDM (same as 802.11a). **By Ken Dulaney**
- "Wireless LANs: An Overview" — Before purchasing, enterprises should obtain a written commitment from the vendor for firmware upgrades to new 802.11 standards. **By Kimberly Hiller**

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