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May 24, 2006

## **Idea for stronger wireless signal is right on the wall UStec wins patent for its residential port device**

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A Victor company has received a patent on a device it says could make it far easier for people to use laptop computers and other wireless devices in their homes.

UStec, which builds and installs home networking systems, has won the patent for a "wireless wall port" that places a wireless transceiver in a wall outlet. The wireless signal is pushed to individual rooms over "cat 5" wiring, the emerging standard in new houses.

The new device would help eliminate so-called "dead spots" in current wireless networks, said Bill Thompson, founder and president of UStec. Until now, Wi-Fi technology has depended on a central router or transmitter to broadcast a signal. That makes wireless Internet access vulnerable to variables such as distance, wall thickness and interference from other sources.

UStec's idea gets around those variables by essentially placing a wireless access point right on an outlet box, wherever a homeowner wants one. The result: stronger signal quality.

"This would guarantee wireless access throughout the house," Thompson said.

The device, UStec officials say, would bridge a gap in the home networking world, settling a debate over whether wired or wireless works best with certain technologies.

The ports could also potentially transmit signals from a cable or satellite box, digital audio, or a home automation system, UStec said.

"We can pretty much deliver as much as a hard-wired approach," Thompson said.

UStec hopes to have a product based on the patent out later this year, Thompson said. While prices aren't set, such a system could cost between \$100 and \$200 per wall port, he said.

The technology could also prove useful in hotels, schools or other large institutions, UStec said.

However, at least one expert said the patent may have some limitations. With Internet Protocol gaining popularity, solutions that combine wireless and wired technology may fall out of favor, said Glenn Fleishman, a Seattle-based writer for WiFi Net News, a tech industry Web site.

"There wasn't any certainty that Internet protocols would wind up being adaptable for different purposes, like television tuning, video on demand, and voice," he said. "It made sense to write a broad patent that focused on bringing many kinds of cables, each one carrying different media, into one outlet."

But the latest IP gear can handle most of those same duties, Fleishman said.

UStec officials, however, think the technology will have wide appeal. The patent is broad enough to apply to a variety of distribution standards, including IP or whatever might emerge in the future, Thompson said.

“With any signal, the shorter the distance between your source and the receiver the better the signal is going to be,” he said.

UStec, founded in 1992, makes wiring systems for new and older houses that help distribute video, audio and other signals for home entertainment and networking. The company employs 40 people and could hire more if the patented product is successful, Thompson said.

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