

COMPUTERWORLD

Microwave technology lures new users

By Laura DiDio

Microwave Bypass Systems, Inc. is seeing its niche market rapidly expand as customers rediscover microwave technology, which was first invented in the 1960s.

Ethernet LANs

microwave LAN devices.

The company has gained a following among hospitals and universities with large campus networks, school districts, military bases and the government.

Bill Mountjoy, director of information services at the Service Employees International Union in Washington, discovered microwave when the labor union needed to link 300 users in two buildings.

The organization originally wanted to go with fiber-optic links but scrapped

Microwave Bypass, a 10-year-old wireless microwave pioneer in Hingham, Mass., manufactures full-speed Ethernet

that plan because the service cost \$2,000 a month.

At \$15,000 per link, microwave equipment is 50% to 70% cheaper than leased lines, according to Eric Hindin, a program manager at The Yankee Group in Boston.

Despite the low cost, Mountjoy said he was initially skeptical. "I thought the crazy weather patterns in Washington, D.C., would disrupt the microwave signal. That hasn't happened; we've had 100% uptime over the past year," he said. "The microwave links only cost me \$28,000, and unlike leased lines, I own the equipment."

The company's installed base now stands at 1,500 users. A profile of the company by Aberdeen Group, Inc., a Boston consultancy, said Microwave Bypass is "the unchallenged leader" in the Ethernet microwave LAN market.

"Microwave Bypass has solid technology, robust products and a current mar-

ket share of 75% to 80%," said Virginia Brooks, Aberdeen's manager of network access technologies.

Phillips Laboratories at Edwards Air Force Base in the Mojave Desert installed microwave links about three years ago to simultaneously transmit a mix of Ethernet, video and T1 data, said one Air Force network administrator who requested anonymity.

Although the company's installed base seems content, Microwave Bypass can't rest on past laurels. To attract new business, founder and President David Theodore said Microwave Bypass must educate users.

"Many people erroneously lump all

Microwave Bypass Systems Hingham, Mass.

Users:

About 1,500

Products:

The LAN-Link 1000 Ethernet Bridge, which transmits voice, video or data over microwave links at full 10M bit/sec. for up to 12 miles

Advantage:

No recurring leased-line costs; users own the microwave, and it pays for itself in about 12 months

Price:

Approximately \$30,000

wireless technologies together or confuse microwave with infrared and spread-spectrum devices," Theodore said. "Another great myth is that adverse weather conditions like rain and dense fog will disrupt the signal — and those issues don't impact microwave technology at all."

Users and analysts have praised Microwave Bypass' service and support.

"They're very customer-oriented," Mountjoy said. "They cut their normal installation time from 60 days down to under 30 days to get us fully operational."

Brooks said that for Microwave Bypass to grow, it needs to make technology alliances with large internetworking vendors.