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AlphaShield revs up for crowded router market

New wireless products offer connectivity up to 370 meters indoors



Internet security company AlphaShield is about to diversify by launching a new series of high-speed, wide-range routers. At right is CEO Vikash Sami, with senior vice-president Nizam Dean. Photograph by: Ian Lindsay, Vancouver Sun

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After having the consumer-level hardware-based PC security market almost to themselves, Vancouver's AlphaShield is about to enter the already crowded field of routers.

Anyone who ventures into a computer store or tech department these days will be greeted by shelf after shelf loaded with routers from Linksys (a division of Cisco Systems), D-Link, Belkin, Hawking and even Apple, with its Airport Extreme base station. It would seem the market is already overloaded with players offering the essential computer-networking element.

But the CEO of privately held AlphaShield, Vikash Sami, believes that his company's new AS-8000 line of routers -- ready to hit the market this spring -- will offer more of everything that both individuals and even corporations want in a router.

To begin with, said Sami in an interview, its wireless AS-8800 model, just demonstrated at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, has the power to offer connectivity of about 370 metres (1,200 feet) indoors and 1,200 metres (3,900 feet) outdoors for a price of \$300.

"Most routers put out 150 to 200 feet of coverage," said Sami. "If it goes through one wall the signal dies 50 per cent. Another wall and its completely dead. We decided to make something that goes through concrete walls."

Sami said the router essentially has 1.5 million square feet of coverage.

"We could have powered up the whole CES floor," he said. "And you could hook up to about 256 computers or laptops."

As well, said Sami, the AS-8800 is bidirectional. That means if the signal is being sent to a laptop across the street -- which normally wouldn't have the power to send back over that distance -- the router would grab the laptop's signal, amplify it and send it back.

Besides homeowners and businesses, AlphaShield is hoping to get a chunk of the gaming market, with built-in support for more than 200 different games.

According to Sami, other features of the routers are:

- Built-in AlphaShield hardware firewall.
- Gigabit-wired speeds via five auto-sensing Ethernet ports.
- Dual processors, one for the network and a co-processor for the Ethernet ports.
- Four USB ports allowing for network print sharing (327 printers supported) and file sharing through a USB hard drive.

Future plans are to support webcams as well.

Prices range from \$150 for a wired model up to \$800 to \$900 for a router designed for the business market, which would put AlphaShield head to head with the likes of Cisco.

The routers will initially be available at London Drugs, which also carries the AlphaShield firewall device.

"With the firewall we're in all the major retailers -- Future Shop, London Drugs, Best Buy, Office Depot and Staples," said AlphaShield senior vice-president Nizam Dean. "And most of our retailers have expressed a lot of interest in the product but they want to see a sample.

"We should be able to ship out the samples by mid-March and try to secure a deal with them."