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Powerline starter kits

Cliff Joseph discovers the reliability of wires with the convenience of wireless

dLAN 500 AVplus

Pros: 500Mbps speed can handle multiple video streams; passthrough socket for mains power

Cons: Expensive considering kit will only connect a single device to the internet

Star Rating: ★★★★★

Company: Devolo, www.devolo.co.uk
Price: £119.99

The dLAN 500 AVplus is the latest addition to Devolo's extensive range of Powerline products.



Power play
Stream multiple files with the dLAN 500 kit

The kit includes two adaptors to get you started, each of which just has a single Ethernet port on it. That means you can connect just one device to the internet, while some of its rivals let you connect three or even four devices. However, the adaptors do provide a data transfer speed of 500Mbps. That may not be necessary for most people, but will appeal to more advanced users who may need to stream multiple video files around their home or office network.

The other advantage of this kit is that the adaptors also have 'passthrough' sockets for mains power – so you could charge your laptop computer off the mains and connect it to the internet at the same time. If you don't need the passthrough option, then there's the dLAN 500 AVmini version that costs £20 less and omits the passthrough sockets. Devolo makes some more expensive 'triple' connection kits too.

Powerline AV+ 500

Pros: 500Mbps data transfer speed; mains passthrough; useful performance-check option

Cons: Expensive; bulky; can only connect one device to the internet

Star Rating: ★★★★★

Company: Netgear, www.netgear.co.uk
Price: £139.99

Netgear's Powerline AV+ 500 kit isn't the most elegant product in this group, but it provides high performance and some handy extra features.

There are two Powerline adaptors in the kit. They both have one Ethernet port each, which means that you can only connect a single device to the internet. Netgear put the Ethernet ports on the top of the adaptors, which means that the cables stick up in the air rather than being tucked down underneath. (That may be to accommodate sockets

that are low down on the wall.)

Like the Devolo kit, the AV+ 500 provides a mains passthrough socket and a data transfer speed of 500Mbps, which is fast enough to cope with multiple audio and video streams. The adaptors also have a clever 'pick a plug' feature that can test the performance of your power sockets to see which ones will provide the best performance. However, it's a little more expensive than the Devolo kit, so it's worth shopping around to see if you can get a better price.



Pick a plug
The Powerline AV+ 500 can test the performance of your mains sockets

Share AV 3 Port

Pros: Allows you to connect three devices at once

Cons: Expensive; maximum data speed is 200Mbps

Star Rating: ★★★★★

Company: Belkin, www.belkin.com/uk
Price: £119.99

Belkin doesn't have the same range of Powerline products as some of its rivals, but its Share AV 3 Port kit is a good option if you have a number of computers or other devices that you need to connect to the internet.

The kit includes two adaptors – the first has a single Ethernet port that you use to connect it to your broadband router; the second has three ports so that you can connect three different devices to it at once. It would be particularly handy in your living room if you have a TV, games console, and a set-top box that all need to be connected to the internet.

Data transfer speed is 200Mbps, which isn't the fastest currently available, but should be more than adequate for streaming music and video around your home network (the Apple TV's Ethernet port only runs at 100Mbps). However, it's a little pricier compared to other 200Mbps products such as the WD LiveWire.



Three's company The Belkin Share kit lets you connect three devices to the internet

LiveWire

Pros: Can connect eight devices to the internet; movable design; good price

Cons: Speed limited to 200Mbps; no mains passthrough

Star Rating: ★★★★★

Company: Western Digital, store.westerndigital.com
Price: £90



Most Powerline kits are very similar, but Western Digital's LiveWire stands out from the crowd in a number of ways.

The first thing you'll notice is that the two adaptors in the kit don't simply look like fat electrical plugs, as all their rivals do. Instead, each adaptor is housed in a little rectangular black box – a bit like a small hard disk – and comes with a separate extension cable for plugging it into the mains.

This gives you a bit more freedom to position the adaptors,

as you don't need to plug them directly into a mains socket.

Each adaptor also has no less than four separate Ethernet sockets, so you can plug in a whole selection of computers, games consoles, and other devices. The data transfer speed is just 200Mbps, but that's fine for most ordinary home and office users (we still have older adaptors that run at 85Mbps!). And, with a price of just £90, the LiveWire is good value for money.



A real live wire Western Digital takes an innovative approach to networking with its LiveWire kit