

NEW PRODUCTS

SCREENING ROOM by Robert Archer

Fiber System Adds HD to Homeowner's TV Diet



As part of the OWLink F02850 kit, the company includes a 30-meter spool of cable.

For years, the custom installation industry has been tied to the unprecedented growth of the new-housing market.

Unfortunately for the installing community, the housing bubble burst and, in its wake, its failures have left both the banking and electronics industries to search for new ways to re-invigorate their sales.

Unlike the financial industry, installers have alternatives. Increasingly, installers are turning to the existing housing market to sell their products and services, which can range from wireless networking devices to powerline control products.

One of the most unique products currently available to installers to fill the retrofit needs of today's cash-strapped homeowner is OWLink's HD Digital Light Link F02850 system, which uses fiber-optic technology to transmit A/V signals up to 1,000 feet.

Features

Other than a switcher that offers two or more outputs, the system (which ships in a lightweight, medium-sized box) contains everything an installer will need to send uncompressed high-definition video to another room in an existing home structure.

Included in the box are transmitter and receiver devices, power supplies to power these units, a 30-meter spool of fiber-optic cable, an IR transmitter and receiver and a pair of HDMI cables.

Based on the list of components within the system, it would be safe to assume it provides the necessary products and bandwidth capacity to carry basic control, audio and uncompressed HD video.

In this case, the assumption is accurate, and (beyond the addition of a switcher) installers will be ready to tackle just about any simple retrofit job that

requires an additional room of video.

Installation

In my home, I set up the system using Tributaries' HM420 4x2 HDMI switcher.

I started by locating the Tributaries switcher next to my Motorola HD DVR cable box, and I connected a Tributaries Series 9 HDMI cable from the cable box's HDMI output into one of the four HM420's inputs. Taking the supplied very short HDMI cable from OWLink, I connected it to the other Tributaries output and into the transmitter box.

After plugging the power supply in, I subsequently ran the fiber cable from the transmitter up my staircase, hanging the fiber on clear self-adhesive 3M hooks all the way up to my master bedroom.

The total distance of the fiber run was in the neighborhood of 20 meters. I strung the cable up at the corner of the wall and ceiling of my home until I reached the HD compatible 19-inch Sharp LCD TV in my bedroom.

With the basic cabling run complete, I preceded to plug in the power supply of the receiver box and run the OWLink-supplied HDMI cable to my television.

The final step was to connect the IR sender to the HD video transmitter unit and to stick the IR piece over the IR eye on the cable box. Wrapping things up, I placed the IR eye to the front of my television and waited for the blinking blue light, which indicates "no signal," to glow solid to show the system was ready to use.

I will point out that, if I were leaving the system in my house permanently, I would have tucked the fiber cable under the rug or drilled a hole through the floor to shorten the cable run and to make the system's install more discreet.

Also, the system has provisions for analog audio via a mini-pin jack. I did not use this option because the HDMI connection carried the basic audio signal that my bedroom television required to complete the install.

Performance

As a whole, I was quite pleased to be able to have HD video in my bedroom.

With the OWLink installed, I was able to access many of the functions that make HD DVR cabling boxes attractive with the caveat that analog-based programming is inaccessible. Even with that, however, there's enough HD programming to satisfy most people, and the picture quality delivered by the fiber appeared to be unaffected by the OWLink system.

There were a couple of instances where the signal dropped out for a second, but it came back up, and there was some latency issues at times with the IR control, but as a whole it was just probably more reliable than any wireless system.

Final Thoughts

I really enjoyed having HD in my bedroom and because it's so easy to install the system should be a consideration to installers looking to add more retrofit options to their list of services.

In addition to the simplicity and overall reliability of the system, I think a major selling point to the system is the fact that, once it's installed, it will pay for itself over time. With cable providers getting additional fees for extra boxes, the OWLink system will save on these "rental fees."

MSRP for the OWLink F02850 is \$799.

OWLink Technology, Inc.

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