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ZyXEL NBG-415N wireless router

Has this got the speed to impress?

by Davey Winder published on 24 May 2007

Another day, another wireless router. At least that's the way it seems, so what can the snappily named ZyXEL NBG-415N do to stand out from the crowd?

Well you might be forgiven for thinking that it is the speed that stands out, considering the packaging makes much of the fact that this is a 300Mbps router.

However, when we put it to the test we could only manage a maximum throughput of half of that. Fast enough, yes, but not the kind of supersonic performance we were expecting. That said, the clever Ubicom StreamEngine technology used by ZyXEL does prioritise data from Internet telephone calls and when streaming audio visual data, which makes for a speedy and smooth experience in this regard. No choppy telephone calls or jittering video for us.

If you want to hard-wire a network into the router then the four 10/100 Ethernet ports will suffice but again, to stand out and deliver that really high speed touch we'd have liked to have seen Gigabit Ethernet instead.

We were, fair play to ZyXEL, surprised to see a USB port though. This turns out to be part of the emphasis on easy setup and exploits the Microsoft Windows Connect Now (WCN) functionality that enables the configuration of the router using just a USB thumb drive.

If you don't have, or don't want to use, Windows Connect Now it's no problem, the standard setup wizards work just as well and make it a quick and easy process.

The range of the draft 802.11n NBG-415N was on a par with most other similar routers in our less than accommodating, rather sprawling, rural testing ground that is the reviewers house and



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offices. It reached most parts, but the promise of no dead spots was not realised as a couple of rooms proved to be through one wall too many and steadfastly refused to receive a stable signal.

The signal strength is generally good, but thanks to the use of WiFi Protected Access WPA2 security, with AES standard encryption, that signal did not extend its reach to unwanted snoopers. Talking of security, the router comes complete with a Stateful Packet Inspection (SPI) firewall and VPN pass-through which means it can allow secure connections between remote locations and users without compromise. A web based interface makes setting this all up as easy as everything else about the ZyXEL.

Although wireless routers should be judged on performance alone, we cannot help but be influenced by design as well. With the trend towards lifestyle router design that does not look out of place in the living room, that begs the user to not to hide it under a table somewhere, we were a little disappointed in the rather industrial and retro (in a bad way) ZyXEL. Small it is not, measuring up at 190x150x33mm, and discreet it is not with that slab of silvery plastic look about it. The two 4dBi external fix dipole antennas and one 4dBi detachable dipole antenna in nicely contrasting black don't help the aesthetic much either.

VERDICT

Ultimately this is not a bad router, but it's not one that stands out enough from the crowd in terms of performance or appearance or cost to get us overly excited.

At a glance

What is it?

300Mbps Wireless Router

Good

USB port, easy configuration, security

Bad

Ugly, expensive

Verdict

A router that promises a supersonic turn of speed and no dead spots, but can it deliver?

Price £99.99

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10