

PINGS & PACKETS

WLAN DETECTION

Fluke finds more wireless nets

LAST MONTH, FLUKE NETWORKS finally added wireless LAN support to the EtherScope Network Assistant via a new



Fluke's EtherScope automatically scans wireless LAN channels.

software load as well as an 802.11a/b/g-compliant client adapter that fits into the device's PCMCIA slot.

I was happy to see that Fluke has streamlined the EtherScope's upgrade process. I can now download the latest software (Version 2.05) directly to a CompactFlash card using the EtherScope; with prior versions, I had to obtain the software on a PC and transfer it.

With the new wireless detection capabilities, the EtherScope automatically scans all WLAN channels in the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands. I was quickly able to identify all detected networks, access points and clients, as well as the security posture of each device.

From a single interface, I could easily call up the signal strength, noise and utilization

rate for every channel and drill down into each for more detailed information. I also liked the built-in tools that allowed me to highlight a particular client and track its log-in attempt to a wireless network, in order to diagnose association or authentication issues.

Current EtherScope customers can upgrade the device to support wireless capabilities for \$2,995, while new customers may purchase the whole package with wired and wireless support for \$7,995. A dedicated wireless-only model is also available, priced at \$4,495.

For more information, check out www.flukenetworks.com.

—Andrew Garcia

TASK MANAGEMENT

Alfresco platform automates chores

WHEN PRODUCTIVITY APPLICATIONS such as WordPerfect ran on 80-column, 25-line text-mode screens, it was easy to write simple scripts in a shell like Quarterdeck's Desqview that knew where to find information on that grid and could automate many content management tasks.

It's about time we saw that kind of ease of automation returning to the even more collaborative and content-intensive office environments of today, with tools such as Alfresco, an enterprise content management platform released this month by Alfresco Software (www.alfrescosoftware.com).

Available in versions ranging from a freely downloadable,

developer-oriented package to a high-end enterprise offering priced at \$625 per CPU per month, Alfresco is open-source and is designed using Web services standards for browser-based, zero-footprint user access.

What really appeals to me is the way the product minimizes users' need to learn more stuff. "We want it to look like a file system to add stuff in, like e-mail for process and like Google for finding stuff," said Alfresco Chairman and CTO John Newton, also co-founder and former lead designer at Documentum, now part of EMC.

Alfresco's integrated workflow management, offline and online synchronization, and content format transformation make it an appealing and easily evaluated option for enterprise settings where content management might previously have seemed like more trouble than it was worth. —Peter Coffee

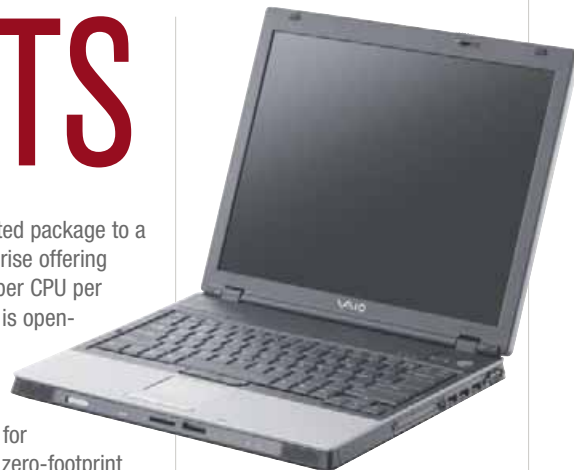
LAPTOPS

Sony's BX543B means business

IT'S PROBABLY AN UNWRITTEN RULE at many companies: Only big shots get to tote around the cool Sony Vaio laptops with the sleek design and bright screens.

With the release of Sony's BX Series in September, though, I hope users up and down the corporate ladder have the opportunity to use one of these machines.

Sony's Vaio BX543B is all business. Priced starting at \$1,300, my 14-inch test unit



Sony's Vaio BX543B laptop adds security to a sleek design.

came with a 1.73GHz Intel Pentium M 740 CPU and 512MB of DDR2 RAM. The unit sported an 80GB hard drive; Sony offers hard drive capacities of up to 120GB. The BX543B is also armed with built-in Bluetooth and 802.11b/g wireless connectivity.

The BX543B is the first Vaio to feature an SD (Secure Digital) card reader—a major step forward for a company that has long championed its own Memory Stick format. This is not to say Sony has given up on its Memory Stick completely: A Memory Stick reader is also built in to the laptop.

In a nod to security-conscious enterprise customers, Sony has implemented biometric features and takes advantage of Intel's Trusted Platform Module to offer users more protection.

One feature I have always liked about Sony laptops is the screen. With its crisp 4-3 aspect ratio, the BX543B's screen is vibrant and bright—something that's sadly rare in business laptops these days.

Then there's the BX543B's overall design elegance. While IBM ThinkPads offer enterprise users many of the same features as the Vaio BX543B, there is something about the design of a Sony laptop that makes it desirable.

More information is available at www.sony.com. —Anne Chen