PeerSpot

Case Study

AirCheck G3

David-Prusynski

Senior Network Engineer at a healthcare company with 5,001-10,000 employees

Review by a Real User

Verified by PeerSpot

What is our primary use case?

I use it mainly for three things. For one, I use it for wired connection. I also use it for a couple of things on the wireless mode, and I use it a fair amount for the wireless locate function.

I'm using AirCheck G2. I know they just came out with G3, which I don't have. G3 has some new features that sound interesting.

How has it helped my organization?

It is a pretty useful tool for some situations. It is a handheld device. It reminds me of something a UPS or a FedEx driver would have. This device is in my bag, and whenever I have to go on-site, I always bring it because I never know if I'm going to run into a wired situation where I want to do a wired test, or I need VLAN or port information. So, I just bring it. I already used it this week for that. It is always there, and it is a really simple test to run. With the live link, I can get historical data on that or at least store it. I use it for that a lot.

It is useful for wireless packet captures. I used it for that this week, and I've solved one of the biggest issues we had with a vendor. I was using it to get the captures and eventually found the solution based on those captures. It is a pretty easy device to do wireless captures. In some of our wireless environments, for example, in our Aruba environment, we can do captures on the APs, but in some of our Cisco environments, they've somewhat taken that functionality away on our 3800 APs. This device is small and convenient. It doesn't need external antennas, and I can take it to a spot, do wireless captures pretty much anywhere, and then use Wireshark

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for analysis.

It is helpful for finding an access point. We're doing an upgrade at a hospital. I work with a cabling vendor who says, "You said you have an AP here, but I can't find it." I can search based on a MAC address or an SSID, find that, and use the locate function. It'll give me a dial indicator and a beep indicator of where this device is. I routinely find access points that we can't physically see, for example, above the ceiling.

It is useful when you're having reports of poor wireless. In such a case, one of the things I'll do is I'll just set this on check SSIDs. For example, in our hospitals, we use very specific SSIDs. If I see one that's not ours, and I know that's not supposed to be there, I want to find that device, and I want to know what's going on with that device. Sometimes, it is a vendor device, or someone has put a hotspot on, but sometimes, it isn't supposed to be there. For example, in a hospital, it is very common to have waiting rooms, and there is a cable TV set up in these waiting rooms. Sometimes, the cable company just turns their wireless on by default. I go in there, and then we contact the cable company to turn their wireless off there because it is impacting us.

I bought one out of my own money. So, I found enough value to spend my own money on it. The guys on our team saw it, and they used to say, "Wow, what's that? What are you doing with that? We should have one of those." I convinced my boss to buy one for the team. Tomorrow, we're going to do a big wireless upgrade in the hospital, and I'm bringing my AirCheck G2. Very likely, we'll run into a situation where it would be an easy tool to use for quickly diagnosing or understanding what's going on.

Wireless planning was one of the things for which we used it a lot last summer. That may seem counterintuitive, but our healthcare system is going through a big wireless upgrade, moving from Cisco to Aruba. We're a rural healthcare system. In some cases, we have a clinic in a town of 1,500 people. I had interns take the G2 and go through the northern part of our state and visit our sites. They used AirCheck to verify wall density and signal degradation through walls. With that information, we could more accurately model those locations in the software we use for wireless planning. We were able to use 20% to 25% fewer access points because I had accurate wall information. We saw the benefit right away of sending our interns to test these remote sites. We could see that we don't need as many APs because we actually measured, and we were not guessing about the wall density. We did that at 15 sites and saved thousands and thousands of dollars. I don't use AirMapper at big sites, but small sites are where we could potentially use it. Its functionality is so easy to use. It allows a less experienced person to be more productive personally. Some of the guys who were doing this work were summer interns. They're not network engineers yet. This tool is easy to use.

Speed of resolution is another benefit, and with that comes customer satisfaction. At one of the

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hospitals, I work with our Biomed team. I took my AirCheck with me because they were moving some monitors around. They were not network savvy. I was able to just quickly plug the Aircheck into our emergency department network jacks and document everything and say, "We're going to reserve that port for this device, and that port for this other device." I could send them an email with all the documentation. They were all set. They could go and implement the solution. To a large degree, our emergency department personnel don't know what happened, but it all works. That's a big thing.

We were having some voice quality issues with some of our iPhones, and it seemed like the Android devices didn't see it. A lot of nurses use little handheld devices that have messengers. So, they have texting on there, and they have voice calls. They also can use it, for example, to scan medication and things like that. They were reporting some voice quality issues. I ended up using my AirCheck to resolve the issue. I was able to show the vendor that on their iPhones, they were not using the correct QoS markings. What was happening was that the QoS was being effectively lost once it left their iPhone. So, we're not giving QoS priority throughout our network. It was a huge issue for us because not only does it impact the nurses, it potentially also impacts patient care.

It makes the speed to resolution faster, and then our staff goes on to the next issue. It enhances our end-users' happiness because they want their problems fixed fast. When I had those guys go out to our small clinics, I didn't have to send a more qualified engineer to be doing this work because obviously, they need to be doing other more intensive network work. So, it frees up the time of our skilled people to do other stuff. It is difficult for me to quantify that from a productivity standpoint, except to say that I saw thousands and thousands of dollars of savings, and I had my engineers doing other things. From what we pay a network engineer to what you pay an intern, might be a $30 per hour delta. I can give this tool to a summer intern making 25 bucks an hour to have him do this work versus having to send a $50 per hour engineer to do the work.

It is hard to measure the reduction in troubleshooting time because I'm never without it. I just bring it, and it is with me all the time. If I go remote, it is packed in my remote box. It is not the only tool I'm using, but certainly, for some issues, it can cut down the troubleshooting time in half or less. For example, one of the tools I use is Ekahau Connect, When I need to use Ekahau, it takes me 10 minutes just to get that set up so I can start using it. After I hit the power button on my AirCheck, it is ready to go in 15 seconds. Depending on the issue, it is just much faster to find a solution.

What is most valuable?

It is portable. It is rugged. It comes with a nice case. It has been dropped, but it doesn't break. I

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don't have a cracked screen or anything like that. It has pretty good battery life.

The other nice thing about it, which I have to admit, is that it has USB ports. When I do packet captures, it is really easy to put them on a USB stick and then bring it into my notebook for Wireshark analysis. I don't have to use Bluetooth and try to connect. I find that convenient.

What needs improvement?

It would be nice if I could import an AP list with a MAC address. When it looks at access points, it should tell me the AP name instead of the MAC address. When you get a MAC address, you can eventually find out where you want to go. However, a lot of times, if I just have an AP name, I know that's in this area or that's over there. I would like that function because AirMagnet, which is the precursor of this, had that ability where you could basically import a list of APs and MAC addresses, and then it could display those instead of just a MAC address. That'd be a nice function. We should be able to put an AP to MAC address in Excel and export it as a CSV file and then import it. That'd be nice to have because I have that information for all my hospitals. The one I'm doing this weekend has got 550 access points. It is much easier for me to look at an AP name than to get a MAC address. Currently, I have to go to a different spreadsheet and try to find that MAC address. If I had the AP name, it would be like, "Okay. Yep. See it. Done."

They are doing spectrum analysis in G3, which I would love to have in G2. That's a nice tool to have, and from what I heard, that's the same price. I'd like to have that. The other function I would love to see is the ability to test fiber. I know the $10,000 version has the ability to test fiber, but I would love this lower-cost device to be able to test fiber.

For how long have I used the solution?

I've been using this solution on and off for close to three years. I used it at a previous company. I also have my own personal one, and when I switched jobs and got into the current company I work for now, I showed it to them, and then we bought two.

What do I think about the stability of the solution?

Its stability has been great. I've had no issues whatsoever. NetAlly purchased AirMagnet, and some of the functionality in the surveying part is probably based on AirMagnet. I used to use that product a lot. I switched to Ekahau specifically because AirMagnet was not reliable. Sometimes, I've used it for an hour and a half, and it would break, and I'd lose a bunch of work, but AirCheck G2 has been rock solid. I can't think of a single time when it didn't work as expected.

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What do I think about the scalability of the solution?

You can use it all the time if you want. We don't. The battery life is long. I could have a person using this for hours per day with no problem, but we don't personally do that just because we're trying to resolve issues faster, or if we have hours worth the wireless work to do, we're probably using a different tool. I'm not concerned about using it a lot at all. There should be no problem.

In terms of its users, we have two different teams. I suspect there are up to 20 users who share these devices. We are network engineers, and then we have some network engineer interns who use it, but we also have our hardware team, which does more PC and printer support. They saw it, and then they went and bought it on their own.

It is being used frequently. For example, with this hospital upgrade, we'll have two of these devices on-site. If we don't have problems, I probably won't get it out of my bag, but if we have a problem, and I'm looking for something, this is going to be one of the very first tools I'll grab to use. So, it is used frequently, and that's one of the advantages. It is portable enough that you can take it along. It is in my bag. If I'm going remote anywhere, I just have it with me.

How are customer service and support?

I have not used their support on this product.

Which solution did I use previously and why did I switch?

At my previous job, we had NetScout. It was like a tablet device that also had AirMagnet on it. That had some of the functionality of this. I can't remember what they called it. It ran Windows, and it was like a hardened tablet, but the form factor wasn't really convenient. It had AirCheck on it. I didn't find even that screen, which was bigger than our AirCheck, really conducive to using for surveys, but it had a lot of functionality of the AirCheck in it. We liked some of the functions, but we didn't really like how it was implemented on that device. So, we went ahead and got an AirCheck.

The form factor was very important. It is so convenient. For example, in that company, I was doing a lot of traveling on flights, etc. AirCheck is small enough, and I can just put that in my notebook bag and take it on the flight. It is in my carry-on. It is not heavy, and it is easy and convenient to have. That's a big plus. A tool is no good if you're not going to be able to use it, or it is a hassle to use. That's one of its biggest advantages. It is simple to pull out and start working with.

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How was the initial setup?

It was pretty easy. You set up your live link. It is not a function I use a lot, but sometimes I do where it can send, for example, test results up to a cloud account, which could be nice if there is something that I need to see from a different engineer. It could be set up to the live link account, and then I could look at it there, but it was relatively easy to set that up. It probably took 10 minutes to do that.

When I get them, generally, we upgrade to the latest firmware, and they have AirCheck Manager, which does that pretty seamlessly. So, that's pretty easy too. I would recommend giving yourself at least half an hour after you unbox it to get it set and get the firmware updated. Then, you can roll. They also have some nice things on YouTube in terms of user functionality. They have some pretty nice videos there.

So, from the time you first open the box, you should be able to set up your live link account, get your firmware upgraded, start working with it, and be productive with it in an hour. It is not that hard to use. It is pretty straightforward.

What was our ROI?

We have, for sure, seen an ROI in our corporate environment. For example, with interns going to those remote sites, we have saved so much more money than its cost. Even counting their travel and everything, we saved way more money. If I quantify it there, we probably saved tens of thousands of dollars just doing that.

What's my experience with pricing, setup cost, and licensing?

I'd always love a lower price, but as compared to some of the other tools, it is fairly reasonable. I personally bought one. So, I must have thought the value was there because I'm spending my own hard cash on it, not just the company's.

You can get support. I don't have support on my personal device. We did buy support for our company devices. It is reasonable. It is not super expensive or astronomical. I'm not aware of any of us having to send the device in or have it break. It is a portable device, and at my previous job, I worked in a lot of warehouses. Sometimes, in a warehouse, you're up on a conveyor. You might be 20 feet up from the ground, testing near a conveyor. If it drops, I want to make sure I get it replaced. So, that's the price you pay.

What other advice do I have?

I would advise thinking about the scenarios where you can use it. If you're looking for a pretty easy-to-use tool that has various functionalities, it is a fairly good tool for that. If this is going to be your exclusive, for example, survey tool, personally, this is not what I would use for that, but for a lot of packet captures, wire testing, rogue device detections, it does a really nice job. The form factor and the interface make it very easy to use.

I haven't used its one-button AutoTest feature to

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identify common problems. I also haven't used the AirMapper function, which is a survey tool. That's mainly because, for me, personally, the screen is too small, and I have other solutions that can also use an iPhone screen. I personally find it too small to be effectively used for displays. I want a notebook-size display or at worst, a decent tablet size to do that. So, that's one function I don't use. I may try it. My concern is that generally, I'm doing pretty good size buildings. It might be decent for a small site, but I am not sure about big buildings. For example, it is a 5-story hospital and clinic we're doing this weekend. Those maps are pretty big. There are hundreds and hundreds of rooms. The size of this display doesn't really work for that map size. I need to be able to see just more than I can display on that size screen for me to do a survey.

In general, it is by no means the only WiFi tool we use. I know that in G3, for example, they're just introducing a spectrum analysis function, which would be nice to have. G2 does not have that. That'd be nice to see for some non-WiFi interference, and obviously, if I was going to buy a new one, I'd buy G3, but WiFi is tough in that one tool generally can't do everything. Understanding what this tool is designed to do, I'm definitely satisfied, and that's why we bought it.

I don't know if it has replaced other tools. I used to use a product called WinFi, which seems to have been discontinued. If I could still use it, I would, but AirCheck has partially replaced that for me. AirCheck provided a lot of the information that the tool did. I don't know if it has replaced many other tools because it is just another gun in the holster, but for some scenarios, this is the first tool I'll grab.

I would rate it an eight out of ten.

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