

Editor's *Choice* from WATERWAY GUIDE MEDIA

A Hands-on Review of Wave WiFi



We usually leave the technical topics to the specialists. But in this case, we thought that a hands-on installation and review of the WAVE WiFi system might be an interesting exercise in a do-it-yourself effort. After all, we like saving money, learning new skills and exploring the latest technologies.

Internet connectivity and networking are no longer frivolous options for boaters, so planning and installing a vessel's access systems is one of the most important assignments that owners either take on themselves or hire out. From our experience, WAVE WiFi passes the test of reasonable ease for novices who want to connect the system and exceeds expectations for operability and signal strength.



Background

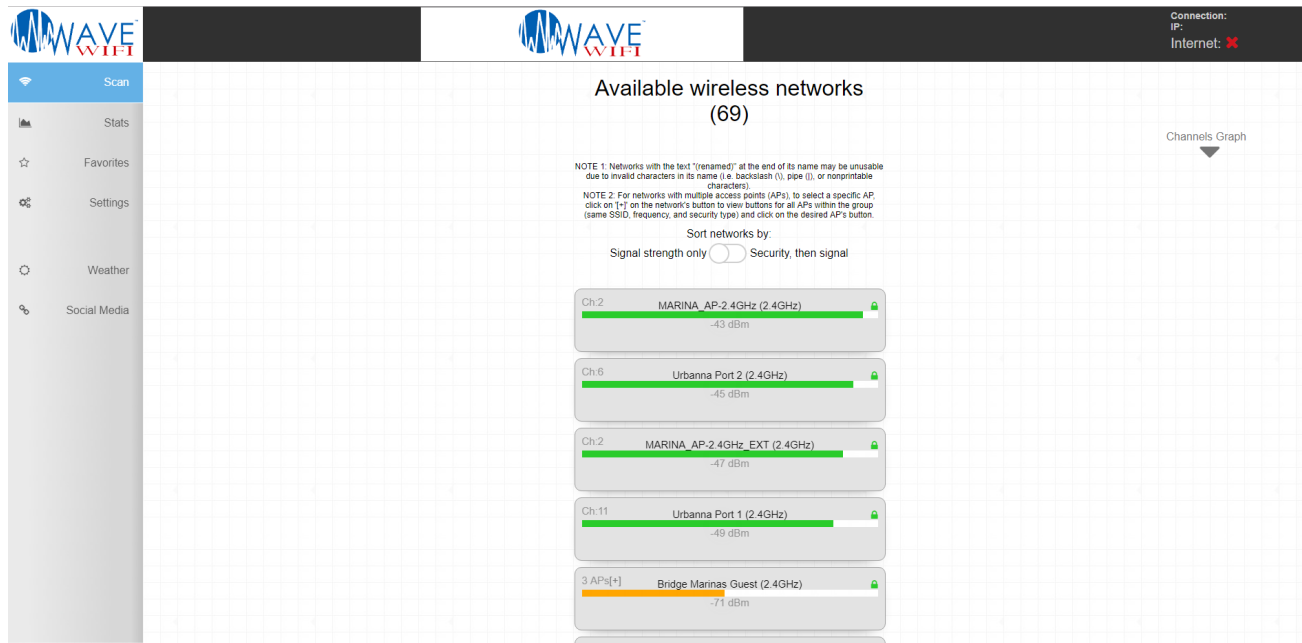


The WAVE WiFi package arrived a few weeks ago and required installation of the antenna on the vessel's roof and snaking the CAT5 cable down into the engine room. WAVE WiFi's antenna(s) and router are well designed and low profile. Further, the WAVE WiFi system will integrate a satellite signal and has a cellular antenna and slot for SIM cards for vessels that want to employ mobile connectivity. We did not connect this component of the system due to our cruising habits and proximity to marina WiFi hotspots. Perhaps we will install and test cellular functionality later.

The Waterway Guide flagship is a 1947 Trumpy of all wood construction and docked within 200 feet of the Urbanna, VA Town Marina's wireless antenna. We have used a competitor's WiFi extender for the past three years with mostly satisfactory results. The router is in the engine room and uses a single antenna to broadcast its 2.4 GHz signal throughout the vessel. Management of the router and incoming wireless signals and administration of the router is managed through a graphic user interface

but like most GUIs, when you get familiar with it, is somewhat easy to navigate and manage.

Installation and Set Up



The first question all do-it-yourselfers and first-timers ask is, “How is the technical support?” With the level of complexity and depth of engineering comprising today’s systems, it’s nice to have a friendly voice on the line when we get flummoxed. On two occasions I had questions that needed answers because I was unable to unravel the printed guidance that came with the system. In both instances I had a knowledgeable and good-natured tech from WAVE WiFi on the line within 30 seconds. The offices in Florida are staffed and available for assistance during regular business hours.

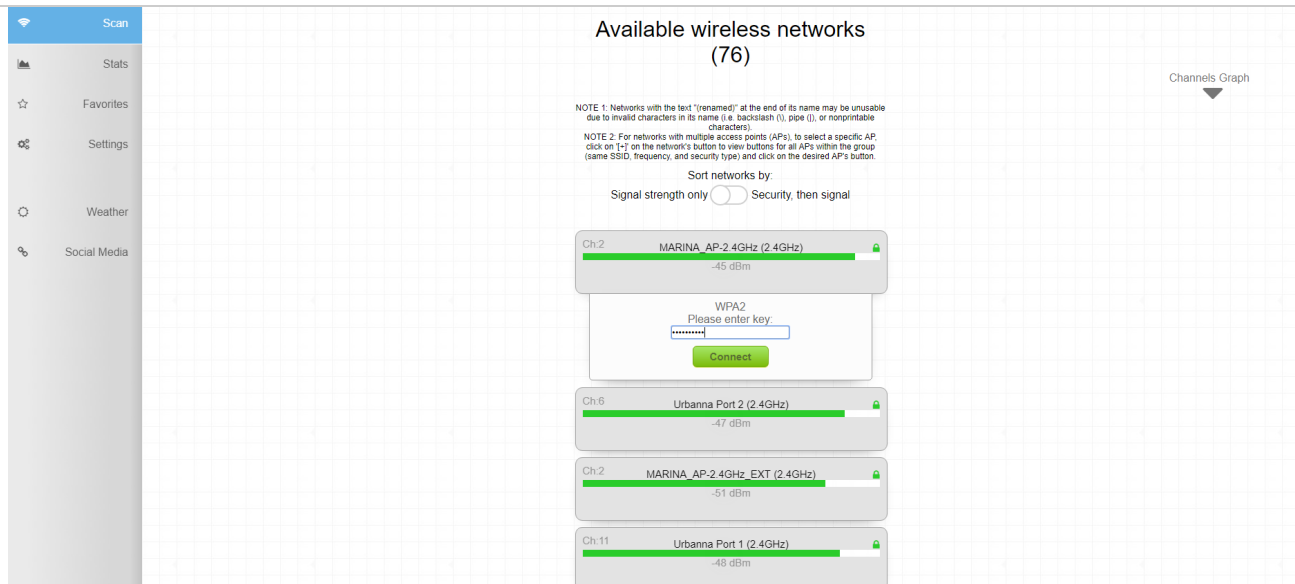
In fairness to the technical support team, I followed the printed directions and set up the system first before calling and asking their advice. The purpose was to become familiar with the GUI and terminology inside the router and antenna dialogue menus so that we could understand each other. I also loaded the firmware updates when prompted during set up. I was hopeful that I could achieve the installation on my own but ran into a wall when I attempted to understand the logic of managing access and passwords.

Complexity and Security

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Because WAVE WiFi is so robust and designed to accommodate the requirements of large vessels with crews, the router allows owners and administrators to manage access, throughput speeds and several associated options related to security. That's where I over-thought the set up and needed assistance. I confused Administrator password credentials with the password for accessing the WiFi signal from the router. I also did not understand how to name the router. When I was straightened out by the tech, who directed me to the printed directions and the proper location in the GUI, all went well. Nonetheless, familiarity with SSID, WAN, LAN, AP and associated terminology is somewhat important during set up. You will also want to use a computer (laptop with an Ethernet connection) during installation as recommended so that you can go through the GUI easily and efficiently. It might go without saying that you will require an internet connection to update firmware and confirm operation of the antenna. So when you're installing have the password to the WiFi signal you are accessing in order to get online.

Bottom Line

- Time for installation, excluding antenna mounting, is approximately 2 hours for the WiFi extender
- Read the instructions
- Visit the WAVE WiFi website
- Understand the terminology
- Use a computer with an Ethernet port
- When the antenna Ethernet cable is plugged in to your computer, you will have internet service when you connect to an external WiFi signal
- Update firmware when prompted and make sure you have a WiFi signal
- Firmware updates require you to click a link and save the file, then use that file in a two-step process. The on-screen guidance explains the procedures, but

- If you get started and then update any firmware in the antenna or router, clear your browser's cache just to be sure
- If you have an existing extender or router on board, confirm that the broadcast channels do not conflict. You can manually adjust the WAVE WiFi settings in the router GUI. Tech support can assist. I disconnected the other router to be sure.

Review



We installed and tested the Rogue WAVE Pro antenna, the Marine Broadband Router (MBR550) and have a WAVE Cellular Antenna (ANT10011C) on board ready to install. All cabling, power supplies and directions were included in the package. Many antenna mounts are available with 1"-14 threads, but it should be noted that the Wave PRO is designed to be permanently positioned vertically. It should not be ratcheted horizontally as that compromises the water integrity of the Ethernet connection inside the antenna.

WAVE WiFi delivers a superb signal and outperforms my 3-year old router due to signal strength, I/O speed, easy to understand GUIs for the router and antenna, and straightforward installation. Most do-it-yourself skippers can install the system with patience and an eye toward details. For these reasons, this system is an Editor's Choice.

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Disclaimer: WAVE WiFi is an advertiser in Waterway Guide Media. We requested this system to install and test on the Waterway Guide flagship after speaking with the technical team and seeing the system in use on various vessels.