Review of Clearwire

Gene Michael Stover

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1   What is this?

Clearwire is a wireless Internet service provider. For a week in March of 2008, I gave it a try with the intent of switching to it from my current ISP & saving some money.

I fully intended to keep the service. I wasn't auditioning it just for the purpose of, say, writing this review.

2   Conclusion

Here's the conclusion first, & you can keep reading to see why I concluded it if you're interested.

If you just use the web, watch some movies online, & you don't know how (or why) someone would run their own web server, e-mail server, or other server, I think you'll like Clearwire & get a good value from it. It had good bandwidth & was easy to setup. The one potential *gotcha* would be if you use Outlook or another mail program directly on your computer (as opposed to a web mail system). In that case, you might want to read Section 7.

If you're a technical user, one who might run his own web server or other servers, I predict you'll have the same experience I did & reach the same conclusion: Clearwire isn't for you. Keep reading to see why.

3   The service I tried

I tried the 1.5 megabit service with a static Internet protocol (IP) address at a fixed monthly cost "for life". I bought the modem.

4   Bandwidth

The level of service I tried was 1.5 megabits per second of downloading bandwidth.

According to speedtest.net, I got 1.7 megabit/second in the download direction & 208 kilobit/second in the upload direction. Nice.

Browsing the web seemed to be a tiny bit faster than my previous (& still current) 700-something kilobit service. It wasn't hugely, surprisingly, stunningly faster, but it was a little snappier.

Uploads were noticeably slower than my current, 500-something kilobit/second. When I tried uploading a large file (60 megabytes), the upload rate dropped over time to less than 100 kilobit/second. I did not upload the same file to the same server using my old ISP, so I don't know whether the decreasing rate was due to Clearwire, the remote server, or even my own computer.

5   Running a web server

You can't run your own web server over Clearwire. Clearwire blocks incoming HTTP requests.

More specifically, I've run a web site at home for years, but when I plugged-in to Clearwire, incoming requests never made it to my network. The problem was not on my web server: When I un-plugged my server from Clearwire & plugged it back into my old ISP, it worked fine again. I had a static IP address from Clearwire, & I directed my domain name to it. I also tried connecting

directly to the IP address. In other words, I'm convinced there was no problem on my end; Clearwire was blocking port 80.

In the Clearwire store, when I bought the modem & signed-up for the service, the salesman said I could run my own web server.[1]

When I experienced the web server problems, I phoned Clearwire about it twice. The first time, the technical support person was surprised that I was having trouble. She said they do not block port 80, but they do block some other ports, she said.

I hung up, tried again, got not joy, & called technical support again the next day. On that second call, a different technician said they *do* block port 80 & also "We don't support web hosting". I also over-heard him verify his claim with his coworkers.

I asked what was the use of a static IP address if Clearwire didn't allow people to accept incoming connections, & he said he didn't know.

6 Running a mail server

I've run my own SMTP server for years. Clearwire blocks incoming connections on port 25 & said so when I asked technical support about it. Unlike the mild confusion about whether they block port 80, Clearwire clearly blocks port 25.

7 Sending e-mail

My iPhone was unable to send e-mail through my Yahoo web mail account when I was using Clearwire. The problem wasn't with my network or my iPhone because to fix it, I just had to plug my network back into my old ISP, & my iPhone could send e-mail again.

I phoned Clearwire's technical support about this, & they were surprised. I didn't ask them more questions about it or try to debug it because, considering the other problems I had with Clearwire, this was the last straw.[2]

My guess is that either:

- their configuration is somehow incompatible with an iPhone (protocol error on someone's part) or

- they allow outgoing SMTP connections to the e-mail accounts they provide (& which I wasn't using) but not to other servers.

If you use a web mail system such as Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, you won't have a problem, but if you run Outlook or some other local e-mail client, you might run into similar problems.

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[1]Salesmen agree to anything, so I'm not surprised that he misrepresented reality.

[2]I wasn't upset. It's just that, with the other problems, I wasn't interested in getting to the bottom of this problem.

8   Peer-to-peer

If you look on the web, there are some forum discussions about Clearwire throttling some peer-to-peer software.

I didn't try any peer-to-peer software, so I cannot verify or refute anything said in those forum discussions.

9   Reverse DNS

I was able to point my domain name to my Clearwire static IP address, but Clearwire said they would not setup the reverse DNS entry. In other words, they would not point my Clearwire static IP address at my domain name.

10   Return & refund

When I phoned Clearwire before the end of my trial week & told them I wanted to cancel the service, they were cool about it. They e-mailed me a UPS coupon. I printed it, slapped it on the modem box (after re-packing the modem), & took it to a UPS Store.

I can see on my credit card statement they they credited me all my expenses *except* 10 dollars. I don't recall anything about how they'd keep 10 dollars instead of refunding everything, but 10 dollars seems reasonable, so whatever.

A   Other File Formats

- This document is available in multi-file HTML format at http://cybertiggyr.com/gene/sx8/.

- This document is available in Pointless Document Format (PDF) at http://cybertiggyr.com/gene/sx8/sx8.pdf.

References