

Walkie Talkies go Digital, at CES Las Vegas

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You are in the wilderness, sneaking up on game with senses 1000x more powerful than your own. Or, you could be preparing your own highly trained squad of paintball commandos to assault the enemy stronghold, or simply trying to rally your family at Epcot. Either way, cheap toy-grade walkie talkies hardly give you the edge in today's digital world. Yet, cellular signals stop in rural areas and the big monthly fees for Nextel or regular cellular can really add up once you get a few units going. In keeping with our usual fugal sensibilities here at Technology-Report, we suspect that, for a single work site or family outing, these nifty rigs may fit the bill for both the sensible cheapskate and smart small-business person alike.

These are TriSquare's latest and most powerful Digital eXRS two-way radios. We spotted these impressive Walkie Talkies at CES, and spent a bit of time interviewing the company president and the friendly, knowledgeable team who came in from Kansas City for the show. We plan on some extensive, and challenging, comparison field tests soon.

“Text Me”

So far, we've seen that these WT's are built well, with surprisingly advanced technology. These unique radios bring cellular features to the Walkie Talkie market, without expensive cell fees, all for a price identical to most conventional 2 way radio units. Intriguing features include texting between units, offering silent, reliable messaging for fun as well as stealth. They also incorporate real privacy by utilizing “frequency hopping” digital signals, just like most of today's cellular phones. The bottom line is that these things are impossible to eavesdrop on by typical yo-yo's with radio scanners, like,

say, the staff at TR (and we've heard plenty on the open frequencies used by conventional radios).

Like new, Digital (HD) TV, the digital signal is said to be robust and comes punching through even in crowded conditions. It would be nice to be able to get through reliably on the impossibly congested channels TR's users have encountered in theme parks, large public events or even within the tourist areas of cities like Las Vegas and San Francisco. There, the simple "privacy codes" of conventional radios can't cope, forcing frustrated communicators to channel hop while fighting through interference.

Military (likely) Grades these an "A"

What's really surprising is that these radios are nearly military grade in their ability to protect privacy. In a way, it's a shame we didn't see more of them during the dark, early days of Iraq (they may have been there, but we didn't "see" them on the newsreels).

Many folks back home noticed that, during the first couple of years of the conflict, service people quickly and quietly adopted civilian walkie talkies for official convoy work and security details, in place of non-existent and non-issued military gear.

Military commanders became concerned when it was reported that once Soldiers and Marines started sporting FRS Radios on their tunics, many enjoyed them greatly and became noisy chatterboxes, just like us civilians. Radio scanners soon appeared in many AQ hideouts, as the bad guys tracked American convoys and patrols. These inexpensive TriSquare rigs could have easily met soldiers' needs for security, as many commanders banned the handy, but insecure, conventional GMRS radios, even if it meant using nothing.

Today, the military has finally issued its own digital radios. Still, privacy continues to be a serious consideration in the peace time world for many parents, companies, security firms and others.

No License required

Which brings us to another interesting point with these rigs. They require no license, and the FCC regulations for these channels place no official restrictions on their use, unlike standard GMRS radios. Many folks don't realize that GMRS radios are limited to family and private, personal use only, and require a \$80 license from the FCC. While many ignore the requirement, it will be a comfort to some, particularly commercial users, that the license, and its fees, are waived when using these 2-way radios.

We are really looking forward to working with these rigs in the field soon, and will pass along what we find to our readers.

John Ghysels, 01/22/09