We are the Plume. We will assimilate your Wi-Fi. Do not resist

Enlarge / Following in the footsteps of major ISPs in North America and Europe, Japanese ISP J:COM is offering Plume superpods directly to its customers.

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Wi-Fi mesh provider Plume announced a deal with another major ISP Thursday. J:COM—the largest cable-TV operator in Japan, with 5.5 million subscribers—is now offering Plume technology in its cable boxes and Plume pods and superpods to its customers for additional coverage where needed.

This is Plume's first deal in Asia, and it follows similar deals with large ISPs in America, Canada, and Europe such as Comcast, Bell Canada, Armstrong, TalkTalk, and more. Plume has been crystal clear since its launch that embedded distribution within ISPs was a primary goal, with direct sales to retail customers being as much for the PR as for the business itself. With large ISP partners on three continents, Plume seems to be making significant progress toward that goal.

ISP partners so far all follow a monthly "subscription" model, with little or no up-front cost and a small monthly fee per pod. This is the model Plume itself favors. To wit, the company quietly deprecated its earlier lifetime membership option earlier this year (grandfathering in the existing

lifetime membership customers), and it now only offers new customers $100 per year annual memberships. ISPs most commonly charge $5 or $6 (or equivalent) per month, sometimes with additional fees for extra pods.

The ISP market is significantly larger than the directly owned Wi-Fi device market. Most consumers aren't going out and buying their own Wi-Fi infrastructure. Instead, they depend on "whatever the ISP gave me"—which becomes an enormous problem for both the customer and the ISP when that solution won't cut it, since that same customer is likely to try changing to a different ISP entirely if "the Wi-Fi never works right."

What makes Plume's continued success in closing these partnerships interesting is how, despite its relatively small size, it seems to be leapfrogging mesh rivals from much larger companies like Google and Netgear. A few ISPs have partnered with Eero (now owned by Amazon), but they're generally smaller or more localized—such as California's Sonic or Kentucky's Blue Ridge—and those deals may not always stick.

In Canada, Rogers partnered with Eero last year to offer "Wall to Wall Wi-Fi." But they appear to be shifting to Plume and are now offering Ignite mesh. Ignite doesn't name-drop Plume directly, but check out the app—and if you're not convinced, note the trio of pods sitting on a desk in the hero image about two-thirds of the way down the page.

Although Plume's superpods came out firmly on top in our testing, we suspect that the company's real edge in closing partnerships lies more in tighter integration. Rivals such as Google, Netgear, and Eero have, so far, been largely self-contained hardware ecosystems, where Plume's firmware is loaded directly into existing Wi-Fi capable cable modems themselves.

Running Plume firmware in the cable modem allows pods to simply be tacked on as "extras," while competing mesh kits

would supplant the onboard Wi-Fi in cable modems entirely. This allows ISPs to have a single technical support pipeline for customers with and without pods, since both are controllable and supportable from the same virtual NOC.

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