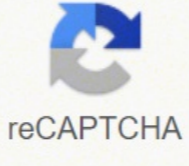




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Radio shack walkie talkies 21-1917

Image not available forColor: To view this video download Flash Player This entry was posted on July 7, 2006 by danny. Updated March 25, 2021 One question that we are frequently asked is "how can I get more range out of my two way radio?" In the case of consumer FRS and GMRS radios, the amount of range you can expect is usually not even close to what the manufacturers advertise. There are, however, several things that you can do to be sure you are getting the most range possible from your radio. Whether you have an FRS or GMRS radio, be sure that you are using it on a higher power channel at its highest allowable power setting. Most of the old consumer FRS/GMRS combo radios support 22 channels at a maximum transmit power of less than 2 watts. As a result of the FCC rule changes in 2017, this reclassified these models as FRS walkie talkies. If the radios are above 2 watts, they are now considered GMRS radios. This means the old FRS and GMRS channels are now shared by both services. However, it is important to note that GMRS radios require a license to operate, while FRS radios are licensed by rule, i.e. no license is required. This means your range is not only determined by how much power you apply, but how much power you are allowed to use. There is one more caveat. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) does not allow transmission on channels 8-14 at more than half a watt of power. This means that if you are on one of those channels, your radio will only transmit using "low power" mode, no matter which service your radios fall under. To put it simply, for maximum power, use channels 1-7 or 15-22. Most consumer radios support two or more power modes. To get the most range, be sure that you are using high power mode on the channels that allow it. Lower power modes will not use all of your radio's possible output power and will reduce range. Be sure to fully charge your battery. The transmission power of a two way radio tends to weaken if the battery is low. Always be sure your batteries are fully charged before using your radios, especially if you will need maximum range. If you are using a GMRS radio and the antenna is removable, consider upgrading the antenna. Most "bubble pack" GMRS radios do not have removable antennas, in which case there is not much you can do about it. Professional grade GMRS radios such as the extremely popular Wouxun KG-805G and KG-905G do allow you to remove and swap the stock antenna for one that is more finely tuned to GMRS frequencies, thus increasing range considerably. The Nagoya NA-701G and NA-771G are two notable examples of high performance antennas for portable handheld GMRS walkie talkies. Both are extremely popular with GMRS operators. Finally, if you still find yourself pushing the range limits of your radio you can try the "monitor channel" feature. Enabling this feature will cause the radio to open the channel, allowing you to hear static and transmissions too weak to be received by the radio in normal mode. Related Resources GMRS Radio Range Chart 30 Miles? The Truth About Range The Two Way Radio Show TWRS-05 - Radios in Range The Two Way Radio Show TWRS-45 - The Truth About GMRS Radio Range Radio 101 - The truth about FRS / GMRS two way radio range How To Optimize Range for Motorola Talkabout Two Way Radios As with so many emerging technologies, it was warfare that helped propel walkie-talkies from prototype to mass adoption in a short time. During World War II, the U.S. and Allied forces were the first to put these newangled radios into widespread use. There were several groups working on this type of radio in the late 1930s, so it's impossible to attribute the exact genesis of the walkie-talkie to one person or company. Radio engineer Al Gross and Canadian inventor Donald Hings were on the forefront of this technological wave, as were research groups at Gavin Manufacturing Company, which is now better known as Motorola. Just before 1940, Motorola produced a portable AM transceiver that became known as a handle talkie. This was an AM-based system (on frequencies from 3 to 6 MHz). It worked, but it was prone to degrading signal quality, meaning static and interference often made communication frustrating. The first design to hit the battlefield in mass numbers, and the first to garner the walkie-talkie label, was the Motorola SCR-300. The SCR-300 was also an FM-based device (40 to 48 MHz), and much more resistant to interference than AM. It also had better range, at around 3 to 5 miles (4.8 to 8 kilometers). FM-based radio signals offered the advantage of squelch, which just meant that the speaker went silent until an incoming signal arrived. Prior to squelch capabilities, radio operators who monitored AM signals had to endure long periods of mind- and ear-numbing static when no one was transmitting on the channel that they were monitoring. The SCR-300 wasn't exactly as convenient as your average pocket-sized smartphone. It required a backpack that housed the battery, electronics and a 33-inch (84-centimeter) antenna, all of which totaled more than 30 pounds (13.6 kilograms). Try dodging Nazi bullets and bombs with that load on your back. In spite of its heft, the unit was rugged and reliable in war zones, and tens of thousands of them were deployed to troops in both the Pacific and European theaters. The end result was forces that could communicate and coordinate their activities much more effectively than ever before. After WWII, walkie-talkie technology hit the mainstream. Military versions got smaller, lighter and more powerful. Amateur radio lovers adopted walkie-talkies en masse. Consumer-grade versions appeared, too, with affordable price tags that made them perfect for basic communications around the house, in the field, and even as toys. No matter what purpose you use them for, walkie-talkies all work pretty much the same. Keep reading to see how these wireless talking wonders conjure their magic. A few months ago, the website for the startup Relay was adorned with smiling children and glowing testimonials from parents, illustrating how the \$50 push-to-talk device would let parents chat with their kids and track their whereabouts without giving them cellphones. But despite the family-friendly facade, companies in the hotel, amusement, and concessions businesses saw huge potential in Relay: instead of using the small, squarish devices to help parents communicate with kids, what if they could be used to replace bulky and expensive walkie-talkies? Some of these businesses started placing orders, and Relay took note. "Demand sort of showed up at our doorstep," says Chris Chuang, Relay's cofounder and CEO. Now, Relay is rolling out a proper enterprise version of the product, with staid black and white color options and features specifically for business use, particularly for companies that have large numbers of employees who are out and about, not sitting behind desks. Relay's push-to-talk button serves as a quick way for workers to get in touch, and it even doubles as a panic button, letting construction crews or housekeepers rapidly send an emergency message. Relay also now offers a web app for businesses, so managers can communicate with their team's Relay devices through a laptop. Instead of just targeting an audience of worried parents, Relay hopes to take a piece of the nearly \$3 billion walkie-talkie market. Relay is an offshoot from Republic Wireless, a wireless carrier that repackages access to the major networks such as Sprint and T-Mobile. When Republic launched in 2011, unlimited calling and text messaging wasn't yet standard, so its big selling point was its use of Wi-Fi to offer unlimited calls and text messages, only falling back to cellular as a last resort. Chris Chuang [Photo: courtesy of Relay] Chuang says that experience managing Wi-Fi and cellular connections led to the creation of Relay. As Republic's employees became parents, they wanted to stay in touch with their kids in a way that didn't involve full-blown smartphones. "We always had multiple segments in mind—kids, seniors, and businesses—but we wanted to start with kids because we had a real problem in our households," he says. Although it doesn't look like a smartphone from the outside, the Relay is similar on the inside, with 4G LTE radios, Wi-Fi connectivity, GPS for location tracking, a Qualcomm chipset, a headphone jack, and a battery that lasts roughly two days on a charge. The main difference, of course, is that it trades a touchscreen for a big button, which users can press and hold to talk with fellow Relay users over a cellular or Wi-Fi connection. Parents could then talk to their children through their own Relay devices or through Relay's mobile app, which would also let them monitor their children's location. The idea was to provide the connectivity of a smartphone without the addiction of yet another screen. Demand sort of showed up at our doorstep. "Chris Chuang Chuang says Relay has "tens of thousands of customers" for the family version, but it turns out that the same properties that made Relay work for kids—durability, simplicity, cost-effectiveness—also appealed to businesses. While walkie-talkie apps do exist for smartphones, the touchscreen requires "active workers"—that is, those in fields like construction and hospitality—to stop looking at what they're doing. Smartphones would also invite distraction from social media and other apps. This helps explain why walkie-talkies have stuck around in the smartphone era, but they have their own problems. Most of them are large and heavy, so they're impractical for workers that don't have an easy way to tote them around, and the costs are as steep as a smartphone, ranging from several hundred dollars to over \$1,000 per unit. "These devices, they haven't changed much from the Nextel days," Chuang says. [Photo: courtesy of Relay] By comparison, the Relay weighs 0.15 pounds and is smaller than a stack of Post-it notes, so workers can wear it as a pendant, strap it to an armband, or clip it more discreetly to a belt. At \$50 per device, it's also a lot cheaper than a traditional walkie-talkie, even when you factor in \$10 per month for cellular service. "The price point enables people to now arm more of their workforce," Chuang says. "Our vision is really to connect every active worker, whereas today where you have to ration out the walkie-talkies. "One of Relay's first enterprise customers was the concessions giant Delaware North, which began testing consumer Relay units last year. Andrew Worden, Delaware North's general manager at the Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati, says his IT manager came across Relay on his own while looking to replace walkie-talkies that were nearing the end of their lives. "The costs continue to rise on the traditional radio," Worden says. "Because [our business is] seasonal-based, it's hard to justify spending \$500 to \$1,000 to replace a number of [walkie-talkie] radios." [Photo: courtesy of relay] The company had looked at smartphones with push-to-talk apps but decided that approach would be too cumbersome and expensive. After ordering a small number of Relays for testing, Worden began talking with Relay directly, and Delaware North has now deployed more than 40 of them to managers across its food, beverage, and retail operations at the ballpark. Worden says the operation is now using more Relay devices than walkie-talkies. These devices, they haven't changed much from the Nextel days. "Chris Chuang "All in all, it's been an effective way of communication, and it's allowed us to cut our costs," he says. David Palumbo, the general manager for Marriott City Center in Raleigh, N.C., gave a similar story. While looking for walkie-talkie alternatives, he received a referral from a colleague who was familiar with Relay. The hotel is currently using them for its security, housekeeping, engineering, front-office, bell stand, valet, and banquet departments, and plans to expand to its culinary and restaurant staff. "This, quite frankly, was a tremendously more cost-effective solution and was much more flexible than a standard walkie-talkie," he says. Palumbo notes that Relay has also been able to add new features in response to his requests. For example, after sending out a message to all channels in an emergency, he can have Relay automatically switch back to individual channels after set a period of time. "If there was something that we would like to see it be able to do, they were able to program it, and within a couple days, activate it with very few exceptions," Palumbo says. If there's a potential Achilles heel for Relay, it's the unreliable nature of cellular and Wi-Fi networks. Try to make a call during a big sporting event, for instance, and you can easily see why businesses might not want to ditch walkie-talkies outright. "Regardless of having 30,000 or 45,000 people in the area, we know it's going to work," Delaware North's Worden says of standard walkie-talkies. "We haven't seen those issues with Relay, but you never know. When you're a wireless or cellular-based solution, there's always going to be that question mark." The future of push-to-talk Although the walkie-talkie business is unglamorous, it's arguably ready for some disruption. According to Maia Research Analysis, the market has grown in revenue by over 8% every year for the past three years, and the group expects that trend to continue through at least 2024, at which point revenues could exceed \$4.8 billion. Despite being more than 75 years old, the walkie-talkie isn't slowing down. Relay's Chris Chuang argues that major vendors such as Motorola, which alone has 50% of the market, don't have the expertise in smartphone-like hardware, software, and networking to make a product like Relay. But perhaps more importantly, walkie-talkie makers currently enjoy gross profit margins of over 40% on devices that can cost hundreds of dollars; they may not want to cannibalize that business with hardware that sells for a tenth of the cost. He notes that while Motorola has started offering cellular connectivity in some of its radios, the feature is only available on high-end models as a profit booster. Although the walkie-talkie business is unglamorous, it's arguably ready for some disruption. "A disruptively priced product like Relay would threaten their existing revenues greatly," he says. Still, Relay may not need to completely upend the walkie-talkie business to succeed. By virtue of being lighter and cheaper, it may appeal to workers who otherwise might not use a walkie-talkie at all. Schools, for instance, might want to equip their teachers with something lightweight for emergencies, and housekeepers could use them as protection against abuse, especially with a wave of state laws mandating panic buttons for hotel staff. [Photo: courtesy of Relay] "I don't mean to benefit as a business from all these terrible trends, but I hope we can help solve these problems," Chuang says. Down the road, Chuang even sees Relay powering a kind of workflow automation system for active workers. With speech recognition, a concession worker might be able to put requests into a resupply queue, and with automation tools, managers might be able to schedule messages for their staff. Chuang doesn't like to say it publicly, but internally Relay thinks of itself as a Slack for active workers, the implication being that it's a platform whose usefulness will extend as more businesses get on board. "As we get with customers, they brainstorm almost as much as we do," he says.

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