



Z-Boost METRO YX-540 Boosts Cell Phone Reception

Quick Look Review by Nancy Gravley | 3:00 PM, Apr. 4th, 2011

Cell [phones](#) aren't perfect. No matter how smart their features, their ability to make and receive reliable calls often suffers. Sometimes it seems that just moving your head or a change in wind direction is all it takes for a call to drop. The Z-Boost METRO YX-540 offers a solution for apartment or condo dwellers who often do not have easy access to a roof or other elevated area to mount a high-gain antenna.

The Z-Boost METRO uses a window-mounted antenna, designed to snare weaker cell signals in marginal areas, and pump them up and then rebroadcast them within your living space – hopefully improving your call quality and reliability.

The Z-Boost METRO is compatible with all U.S. carriers and [mobile](#) devices using 800 & 1900 MHz except Nextel/iDEN or 4G, 2100MHz phones. It is optimized for iPhones and was tested using iPhone 4, iPhone 3GS, and 3G using AT&T.

Installing the product

The installation of the Z-Boost METRO is the key ingredient to successfully using this product.

The box arrives with everything you need to build your own mini cell-site. There is a utilitarian white plastic antenna, a sturdy plastic repeater unit with a single antenna, a power supply, and a generous coil of coax cable with screw on-connectors to link everything together. Also included are ample, yet simple instructions – and suction cups to aid window installation.

There are two primary components. A receiving antenna and a repeater unit.

The first step is to find the best window for the receiving antenna, and there is where I was stopped cold. The receiving antenna must be placed on a window that is two feet away from any metal. All the windows in my condo have burglar bars.

So I enlisted the help of a good friend who has such poor reception at home for his iPhone that the only place he could make calls was from one plastic chair in his back yard. He jumped at the chance to help evaluate the Z-Boost METRO. The installation and testing all took place at his house.

The first step was to find the best window for the receiving antenna. You may be lucky enough to have an exterior window that actually faces one of your carrier's cell towers. In our case, it was close, but no cigar. Although a tower was relatively close, there's a ridge between it and his house, blocking the direct signal. Our best choice was a more distant tower that has line of sight.

Many carriers will help you locate cell towers nearest your house or work location – and may even provide a link to a web map showing tower locations. We weren't that lucky. Since we both have iPhones and AT&T, we were left on our own.

Anticipating such problems, Z-Boost suggests you visit your exterior windows, and hold your iPhone against each window and closely observe the bars representing signal strength. Note which windows offer the strongest signal. Obviously wooden windows are preferred — remember that metal will interfere with the signal.

Place the antenna as high as possible on the window, and affix it, at least temporarily, with the supplied suction cups. They will suffice during testing.



The receiving antenna

Next, select a location for the repeater. They recommend a location in the center of your living area, away from large metal objects, and other electronic equipment like cordless phones and stereo equipment. They also recommend you keep the transmitter unit separated from the window unit.

We found that patience in checking out several locations for both the receiving unit and the receiving antenna resulted in the best final results. As it ended up, we had to add an extension cord once we found the best placement because the power supply cord supplied is fairly short.



The repeater unit

The final step is to connect the two units by coax and plug in the power supply. There is no power switch because you never turn it off.

Observe the status/power light on the top of the unit. Red means bad, and green means good.

Once the unit powers on and negotiates with the cell tower and acquires signal, it then evaluates whether the setup is satisfactory. Green you pass, red you fail.

In reality – it isn't that simple. What may be acceptable to the base unit, isn't necessarily what provides the best and most reliable boost for your cell signal.

Be prepared to tweak your setup endlessly, maybe for days – in our case - weeks. Remember that in our test situation the signal was so bad that my friend could only make cell calls from one spot in his back yard and never without drops during each call. Because there are so many variables that affect the effectiveness of Z-Boost, don't cheat yourself by being hasty or sloppy in your setup and testing.

Make calls throughout your house, especially in areas that previously dropped calls or had reception problems. We found that minor changes to the placement of the base station often made remarkable changes to the improved reception. For instance keep the unit a few feet away from lamps or light fixtures using compact fluorescent bulbs. A convenient table was nixed because of a nearby lamp that seemed to interfere with the signal.

Using the product

In all, the two of us spent six weeks evaluating and testing the Z-Boost METRO YX-540. My friend, of course, did most of the testing after the system was installed. While we can't say that there have been no dropped calls, there have been few. He also reports that calls are clearer and less phasey, reporting that: "my calls are MUCH clearer and more reliable. The result even on the back patio are startling — a full thirty feet from the base station repeater, through two walls."

Do I recommend it?

I do. As you can tell from our setup experience, it takes patience on the part of the user to find the perfect location, but the difference in [cell phone](#) calls from my friend to me and vice-versa are astonishing. Prior to installing the Z-Boost METRO we actually had a system in place as to who would call the other back when calls dropped because it would happen two or three times during each call, and because we are both officers in our local Mac users group, we talk frequently. Dropped calls have practically ceased to be a problem when we talk.

With an MSRP of US\$299.99 the Z-Boost METRO is not cheap, but I found it on the Internet at prices ranging from US\$183 on [Amazon](#) to US\$195.

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