

The Street

Try Jim Cramer's
Action Alerts PLUS

Personal Technology

► [Return to Article](#)

New Ways to Improve Cellphone Reception Indoors

Tamara Chuang

10/10/12 - 01:30 PM EDT

NEW YORK ([TheStreet](#)) -- It doesn't matter if you pay for the fastest 4G network if you get awful signal inside your house. But you may be able to do something about it without breaking your two-year contract.

Mobile carriers are more anxious than ever to keep customers, and often will provide signal-boosting devices and service for free. But that's only if you've tried everything else.

Those darn brick walls -- or nearby trees and mountains or other vents and wiring inside the walls -- could be blocking valuable signals to your basement. But if there's a tree blocking your direct sight to the nearest cell tower, consider these tips before chopping down trees or knocking down walls.

Talk to your mobile carrier: While not a new tip, this is the first place to start when your home lacks a signal. The mobile industry is super-competitive and many of the companies will do anything to keep you.

Check with them to see what they'll offer you. My own carrier suggested replacing the SIM card (the existing one could be outdated or corroded) and turning on "data roaming." Also, keep your phone charged (power improves signal strength) and get rid of the metal case (weakens signal). The carrier may even send a technician to your neighborhood to check outdoor signal strength. If they discover that is terrible, they'll know what to fix first.

Try a new app: If you've got a smartphone, there is a [plethora of apps](#) providing tools to pinpoint nearby cell towers, display your phone's signal strength and check who has the best service in your neighborhood. Some apps reboot your phone, recalibrate the wireless radio and automatically connect you to the strongest signal. See "Apps to help improve smartphone reception" for reviews of related iOS and Android apps.

Get a 4G boost: Signal boosters use power to amplify a signal indoors and have been around for years. They typically consist of an outdoor antenna and an indoor amplifier. Only recently have 4G boosters hit the market.

One of the device leaders, **Wilson Electronics**, just expanded its first line of 4G mobile signal boosters. Its new Sleek 4G line (a two-piece device with an antenna that sticks to a building's exterior window or car roof, and a second piece that stays inside to boost signal) offers 20 times the power of a typical cellphone signal.

Other new 4G signal boosters are now available from Wi-Ex and Cellphone-Mate. Also, check with your carrier for a possible freebie. **T-Mobile**, for example, offers a [Cel-Fi signal booster](#) for cheap or free if you're willing to commit for two more years.

Tip: Make sure the signal booster you buy works with your phone's wireless frequency. While a phone can operate on multiple frequencies, it only works on one frequency band at a time. Consider a dual-band signal booster.

Fire up Femtocell: These mini cell towers target indoor users living in areas where even signal outdoors is mediocre. Unlike boosters, femtocells require a home broadband Internet connection, like a cable modem, which it converts into a cellular signal. Phone calls aren't routed over Wi-Fi (unless you're using T-Mobile's Wi-Fi calling alternative), but rather they use the same cellular technology your phone already uses, which is better on battery life.

They also require GPS because each device is set to operate on a specific mobile network, as approved by your phone company. Only recently have carriers begun offering distressed users a free Femtocell. Otherwise, it costs between \$100 to

\$300, plus a possible monthly fee.

In the U.S., **Sprint** (S) offers the Airave, **Verizon** (VZ) has the Network Extender and **AT&T** (T) offer the Microcell femtocells.

Here's [a chart of international mobile carriers](#) offering femtocells, as pieced together by the Small Cell Forum.

Tip: Femtocells aim to improve voice calls and not necessarily data transmissions. The industry assumes users will stick to Wi-Fi to increase a phone's data speeds indoors.

This article was written by an independent contributor, separate from TheStreet's regular news coverage.

Visit TheStreet for more great features

THESTREET PREMIUM SERVICES

From the action-oriented investing ideas of *Action Alerts PLUS* by Jim Cramer to the expert technical trading strategies of Helene Meisler's *Top Stocks*, TheStreet.com offers a range of premium services to help boost your portfolio's performance. [View now.](#)

EXPERT ADVISORS ALERTS DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX

Action Alerts PLUS: Cramer's personal portfolio, emails before he acts.
RealMoney: 70+ experts share their top investing ideas and analysis.
Stocks Under \$10: Alerts identify undervalued stocks with profit potential.

FREE NEWSLETTERS

Get an edge on the market with the help of free email newsletters like Jim Cramer's *Daily Booyah!*. Learn about the day's major market events, companies that sizzled or fizzled and lots more that can help you make more profitable investing decisions. [Sign up.](#)

Sponsored Links

CNBC Technical Analyst

Get Greg Troccoli's Propitiatory S&P 500 Research for Free
www.chartlabpro.com



Are Annuities "Safe"?

Don't Buy Any Annuity Until You Watch This Special Video Report!
SeniorAnnuityAlert.com



Penny Stock Ready to Soar

1 Under-the-Radar Stock You Must Buy Now!
www.PennyStockWizard.com

OVERSTOCK Laptops: \$27.81

Get a new Laptop for as low as \$27.81. Limit 1/Customer. Grab Yours Now.
zbiddy.com/laptops



Brokerage Partners

