



PRIMER

SNAP Primer

An Introduction

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1. Introduction

The SNAP network operating system is the protocol spoken by all Synapse Wireless devices. This networking protocol can run on any of a handful of hardware sets. You can use the modules we create, which we call SNAP Engines, or you can incorporate the chipsets into your own hardware.

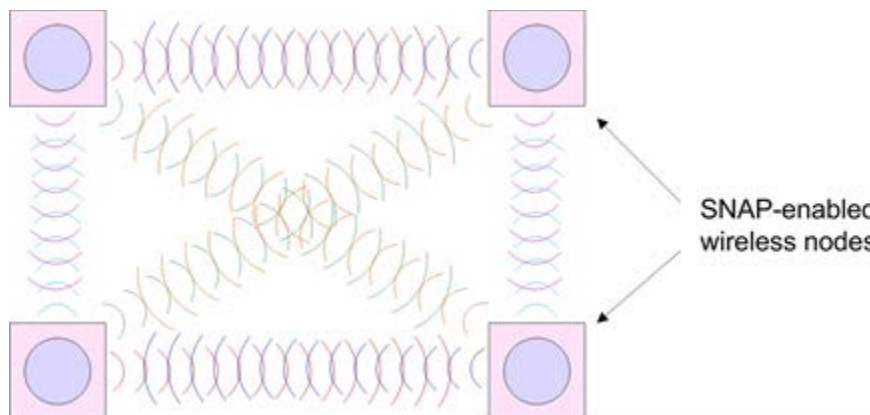
With the SNAP OS firmware installed, the device automatically forms an ad-hoc radio mesh network with other SNAP devices in range, so each can pass information back and forth, and can relay messages to other SNAP devices that might be out of the original sender's range.

Each of these devices is a combination of a data radio and a microprocessor (literally, "small computer"). Each one can not only relay, send, and receive instructions from somewhere else, it can apply some of your own business intelligence using SNAPpy, an easy scripting language based on the powerful, popular Python programming language.

It is easy to write your own scripts to monitor input signals (analog or digital) and control outputs. You can send and receive serial data, or connect to other devices over connections like SPI and I2C. And with your own SNAPpy script in place, the device can be smart enough to know what signals and messages, or what combination of signals and messages, is important enough to act upon – whether that action is setting some output locally, or sending a message to another device in the network.

This means you can use SNAP products to keep track of and control what's going on somewhere else. The control can come from explicit commands you send, or from automated instructions triggered in response to timed events or changes to the environment.

SNAP devices are social entities, and when you power them up they are happy to find other devices with which they can communicate. By default, they are configured for automatic mesh routing, which means they not only talk to each other as peers, they also act as go-betweens, relaying messages between peers who might not be able to hear each other. (More on this later.)



Four SNAP devices in a Mesh Network

In other words, you don't need to do anything special to start up a network of devices that can monitor and respond to each other. With a line-of-sight range up to three miles, your devices can be distributed over a wide geographical area (or all grouped in the same building) and still maintain automatic communication between devices.

The term SNAP has also evolved over time to refer generically to the entire product line. For example, we often speak of "SNAP Networks," "SNAP Nodes," and "SNAP Applications." With just a little bit of background, it's easy to see how all these parts fit together.

2. The Pieces and Parts

Any SNAP network is going to have some collection of SNAP devices associated with it. In order to best describe these parts and how they work together, it may be best to start by defining some terminology.

Nomenclature

With all the various SNAP elements in the conversation, it is easier to keep up with what's going on if you know the difference between a SNAP widget and a SNAP doodad (so to speak). This list will introduce you to the most common terms and explain how they fit together.

SNAP

SNAP, as mentioned before, is the protocol used by all SNAP devices. It is the underlying operating system that allows devices to talk to each other, comprising the communication and control structures between SNAP devices. The SNAP OS is the infrastructure that creates the mesh network.

Most SNAP communications come in the form of a request by one SNAP device for another SNAP device to do something. At the most simple level, that request can be “Here, take (and process) this data.” It can also be more elaborate, such as “Take a look at the thermal input you have from the device to which you’re connected and let me know if I need to warn somebody of a pending meltdown.”

SNAP also supports a “transparent data mode,” where data coming into a device passes directly through to another SNAP device without being examined or acted upon.

SNAP Device

SNAP devices, then, are devices that are running the SNAP operating system so they can communicate with other SNAP devices. Each SNAP device includes a microprocessor of some sort (SNAP OS has been ported to several, with more in the works) and a communication interface. While the communication interface is typically a radio, it can also be a serial port, Ethernet connection, etc. It can even be several of these.

SNAP devices include SNAP Engines built by Synapse Wireless (or other vendors) and devices that other companies build into their own products that include the SNAP protocol.

SNAP Node

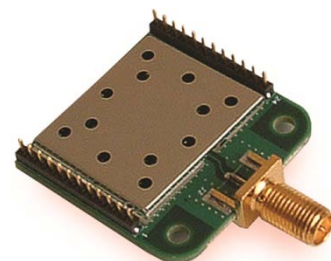
A SNAP Node is a little bit more of an abstraction than a SNAP device, though on some level the two directly correspond to each other. Each device in a SNAP network is referred to as a node in that network. In general, the term *SNAP device* will be used to refer to the product or tool that includes SNAP, and *SNAP Node* will be used in the context of networking.

Each SNAP Node necessarily is a SNAP device, and each SNAP device, when included in a network, is a SNAP Node.

SNAP Engine

A SNAP Engine is a SNAP device that matches one of the form factors standardized by Synapse.

Synapse currently has two footprints of SNAP Engines: a 24-pin through-hole module, and a 64-pad surface-mount module. SNAP Engines are produced (for various CPU/Radio platforms) by Synapse Wireless and by a few other hardware



developers. SNAP Engines provide an easy way to test various hardware for prototyping, proof-of-concept work, and small-scale implementations of final products.

Each hardware combination has its own strengths, so you cannot necessarily drop one variety of SNAP Engine into an environment customized for a different SNAP Engine without some adjustments. But within the scope of a particular engine (such as the RF100), one SNAP Engine can be replaced by another seamlessly.

Bridge Node

A bridge node is a SNAP Node used to bridge the connection between one network section and another. For example, a SNAP device connected to your PC, using either a serial port or a USB port, forms the bridge between other nearby SNAP devices in your wireless network, and Portal (or a custom application connecting through SNAP Connect). Similarly, a SNAP Connect E10 unit bridges a local radio network to another SNAP device or network across the Internet (or other TCP/IP network).

Products

Synapse offers many products that fill the various needs of a SNAP Network. The software and hardware solutions offer the flexibility to quickly develop complicated systems to control and monitor nearly anything. You will encounter references to these products in the various SNAP literature.

Note that it is tremendously unlikely that any given network will have all these hardware and software variations in it. Most networks will have a collection of nodes based on one particular platform (or SNAP Engine), and one PC-based control or monitoring point (based on Portal or SNAP Connect).

Software

Portal

Portal is a SNAP implementation to turn your PC into a SNAP device, so it can communicate with any other device (node) in your network. It is a GUI application that you run on your computer (Windows, Macintosh, or Ubuntu Linux). Using a serial connection to a bridge node, Portal provides the nexus into the rest of your network, with an easy-to-use interface.

Portal is also what you use to administer and maintain your nodes, by loading controlling scripts into them and monitoring their communications. See the Portal Reference Manual for a complete understanding of Portal's role in your networks.

SNAP Connect

SNAP Connect is a Python library that you can import into your own client applications to allow them to access your SNAP network the same way Portal does. Through this SNAP Connect interface you can send instructions and data to and receive instructions and data from any other node in your network.

SNAP Sniffer

The Portal installation includes firmware images that allow you to convert a SNAP Node into a SNAP Sniffer. As a sniffer, the device no longer interacts with other nodes in your network. But combined with Sniffer software running on your PC, it reports back all the network traffic it hears (on a specified network channel). This can be valuable for troubleshooting communications within a network.

SNAP Firmware

The Synapse Wireless SNAP firmware is the code that turns a piece of hardware into a SNAP device. Without the firmware the radio and microprocessor may have the ability to communicate, but have no operating system

providing instructions on how to do so. In general, firmware provides such instructions, with SNAP firmware telling the devices how to participate in a SNAP network, unifying communications and control across disparate physical layers and across different platforms.

If you acquire SNAP hardware, the firmware will already be loaded. Each hardware platform has its own firmware build, and most platforms have several firmware builds available for them. The normal build includes all the usual SNAP features.

For testing purposes, some users like to have access to a “debug” build of the firmware, which provides more details about exceptions caught in users’ code. The debug build runs slightly slower than the normal build and provides a little less code space for user applications, so most users would not run this in a production environment.

Most platforms also have an AES-128-capable build available. This build allows for much stronger encryption than the Basic Encryption available in the normal firmware builds. (The AES-128 firmware may not be available in all jurisdictions.)

SNAP devices from Synapse Wireless will ship with the most current release of the firmware installed. Synapse Wireless continually updates the software to include new features, so users may want to update their firmware at times. The process is simple, and is covered in the Portal Reference Manual.

Hardware

SNAP Engines

Synapse manufactures a variety of SNAP Engines based on various hardware platforms. There are several offerings in the 2.4 GHz spectrum, and other options in the sub-GHz range.

SNAP Engines come in two general form factors: 24-pin through-hole modules, and 64-pad surface-mount modules. These two form factors may further offer various alternatives for antennas (built-in F antenna, RP-SMA connectors, etc.).

USB Bridge Nodes

Synapse has several USB devices available to bridge between network sections. SNAP Sticks, about the size and shape of a USB “thumb” drive, connect your 2.4 GHz wireless network to Portal or, through SNAP Connect, to your own custom application. There are also SN132 USB boards that accept any through-hole SNAP Engine and plug directly into a USB port, for the same purpose.

SNAP Connect E10

The SNAP Connect E10 is a SNAP-enabled embedded connectivity appliance that allows you to connect between disparate SNAP networks over TCP/IP networks, such as the Internet. It provides a Linux environment on which you can deploy your own application to control and monitor your SNAP network, coupled with a SNAP Engine to tie the Linux environment to an existing SNAP wireless network. In this way, a SNAP network in one location can control and respond to other Internet-connected SNAP nodes anywhere in the world. The applications you install in the E10 can also perform any other function you care to program in response to feedback from your widely distributed SNAP network.

SNAP Link

SNAP Link modules provide a simple way to replace wired serial connections between two devices that need to communicate with each other. When you have two devices that require a serial connection (RS232, RS422, or RS485) and connecting them with a physical wire is impossible or impractical, SNAP Link modules can wirelessly

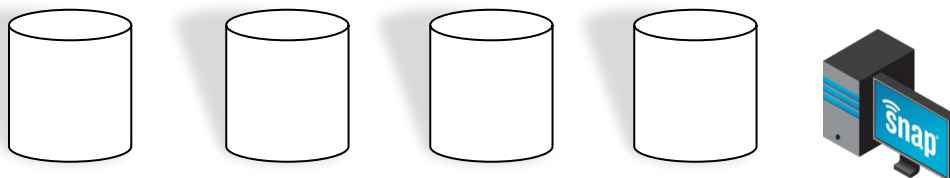
replace the cable. Because SNAP Link modules are SNAP Nodes they automatically take advantage of mesh routing, allowing you to extend your effective range and increase reliability.

Sample Applications

So, how do these pieces fit together? Here are a few examples of ways someone might use SNAP devices and what it would require to establish your network.

Tank Monitoring

Consider a facility with a series of storage tanks, each with an independent means to measure conditions at the tank, such as its temperature and how close it is to capacity.



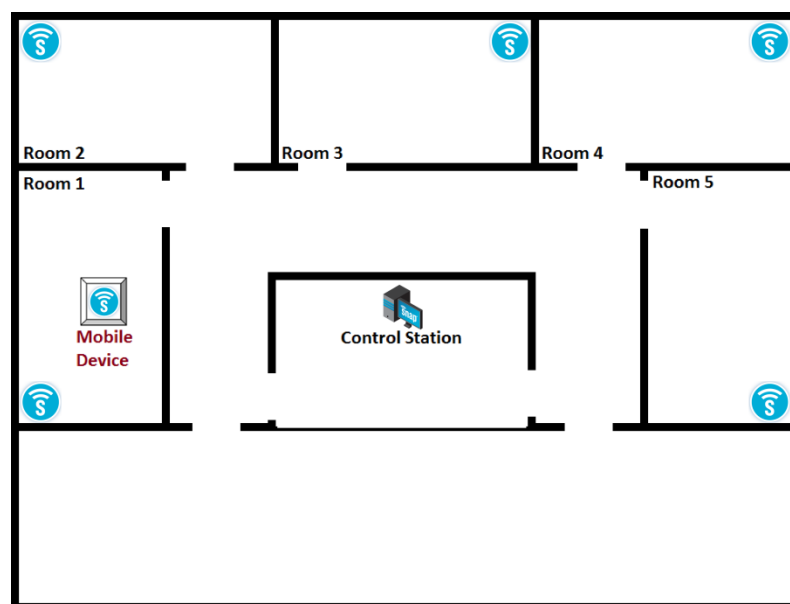
Connect a SNAP device at each measurement site, and have a bridge node connected to a computer within range of one of the nodes. On that computer you can run Portal or your own application and either have the measuring devices periodically report their details, or have the computer periodically query the other SNAP devices for their information. These values can be stored on the computer node, and acted on as appropriate.

This arrangement requires Portal or an application connecting through SNAP Connect, a bridge node, and a SNAP device for each tank. As long as each SNAP device is within radio range of another SNAP device in the network, all devices will be able to communicate with the entire network.

If any nodes (or node clusters) are distant enough to not be within radio range, you could use a SNAP Connect E10 at each site, connected to the Internet, for the same distributed network. Each node would still be able to communicate with all the other nodes in the network, over the Internet instead of over the radio.

Location Tracking

Consider an environment where there is a piece of portable equipment used in multiple locations within a facility, such as a diagnostic device in a manufacturing environment. You could use a SNAP network to locate the device within the facility.



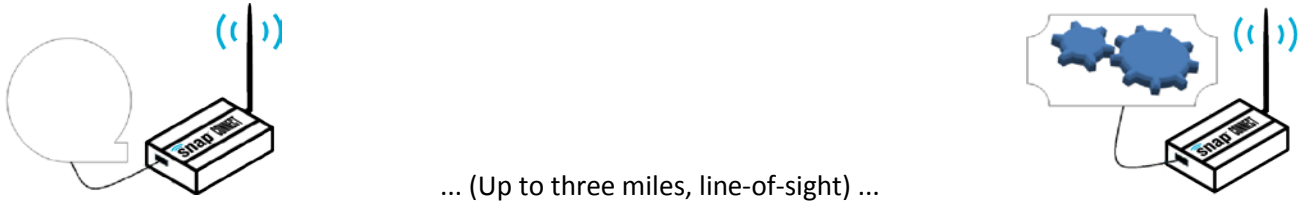
Affix a SNAP Node to the device. Situate other SNAP Nodes in the facility at strategic locations (such as near the stations where the device would normally be used), and you will be able to judge the approximate location of the device based on the strength of its signal to the stationary points. In the example diagram, the signal between the mobile device and the SNAP Node in Room 1 would be stronger than any other signal, indicating that the device is in Room 1.

This arrangement would require a bridge node, and either a Portal script or an application connecting through SNAP

Connect (together in the Control Station in the diagram), stationary SNAP devices within the environment (in each room in the diagram), and a SNAP device connected to each piece of equipment being tracked.

Cable Replacement

Use two SNAP devices to replace a length of serial cable in places where connecting them with a physical cable is impractical or impossible. This can be accomplished with any two compatible SNAP devices, such as a pair of SNAP Link modules, which come configured for the task.



Apart from allowing for greater physical separation than a serial cable permits, using SNAP devices to replace physical cables allows for electrical isolation of the end devices

3. So, what's a mesh, anyway?

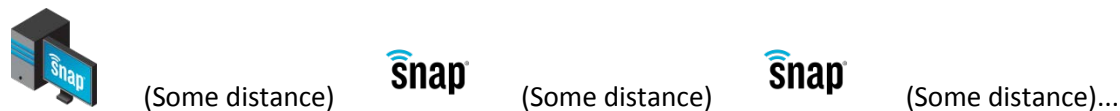
Automatic mesh routing is one of the features that makes SNAP networks so useful. As soon as you power up a SNAP node, it automatically becomes a peer in whatever SNAP network you have available.

There is an important detail here: All nodes in a SNAP network are peers. Each radio node can talk directly to any other node within radio range, and indirectly to any other node in the network. There is no need for a “master” or “coordinator” in a SNAP network. Though it’s easy to think of the Portal node (or SNAP Connect node) as “the boss” of the network (and in terms of command/control it may serve that function), the underlying communication structure does not require – or even accommodate – that any one node act as a hub or traffic director.

Every node in the network does its part to make sure all other nodes receive the messages intended for them, regardless of how the messages originate. By default, nodes forward messages addressed to other nodes that are out of radio range of their source, and nodes retransmit multicast messages, to ensure that everyone within range gets a chance to hear them.

A simple mesh example

Consider a network where you have a computer and a series of SNAP devices extending in a line away from the computer over a stretch of many miles.



If the distance is great enough, the SNAP nodes (SNAP devices in the network) farthest from your computer might not be able to directly hear messages sent by your bridge node. With mesh networking, the system automatically forwards messages out to the farthest reaches of the network.

In some cases one node may need to send a message to another specific node. In SNAP parlance, this is referred to as a “unicast” message. The message goes out to the network “addressed” to the intended recipient. If the intended recipient is out of range, the mesh network automatically determines a viable path for the message to travel to its destination node. The message then “hops” from one node to another (leapfrogging intermediate nodes when appropriate) until the destination node hears and acts on the message.

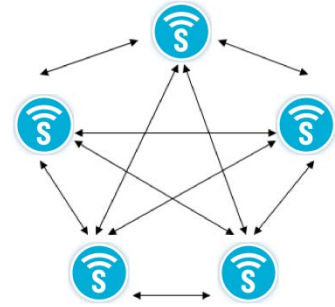
If, for some reason, the intended recipient of the message doesn’t hear it (perhaps that node is busy talking instead of listening, or is “sleeping” or busy performing some other function at that moment), the SNAPpy script in the node that sent the message can automatically try again to be sure the message gets through.

In other cases, one node may need to send a “multicast” message, meaning that the message is intended to be heard (and possibly acted upon) by every node that receives it. The mesh network helps there, too. When a node hears a multicast message, it will automatically rebroadcast that message to make sure that each of its neighbors has had an opportunity to hear it, too.

Do I really need all that?

The behaviors described so far are the default behaviors of SNAP Nodes. But SNAP is widely configurable. You can use your SNAPpy scripts or Portal to set configuration parameters to control many of the mesh behaviors, from the number of times a node will rebroadcast a unicast, to the number of hops a multicast should travel, to which subset of nodes should act on a multicast message.

Out of the box, SNAP Nodes are configured for a typical, general-purpose mesh configuration. But just as there's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all suit, it may be appropriate to tailor the mesh parameters based on your environment. Here are a few ways you might have your network arranged, and some settings that might improve performance in those environments.

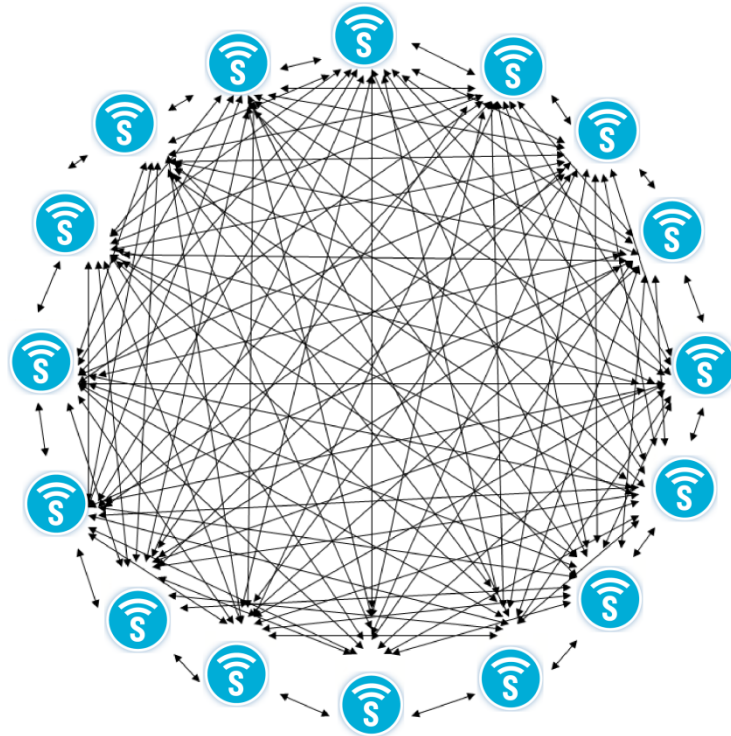


Simple, Short-Range Group

In a network topology where all nodes in the environment will always be within radio range of each other, you can improve response time by telling each node to not bother sending periodic route requests to make sure it knows a path to its peers. Unicast messages will always go out with the expectation that the destination will be in range, and routing requests (which make use of mesh routing to have nodes forward messages to other nodes) will only happen if the initial transmission fails.

Very Dense Multicast Cluster

If you have many nodes within range of each other and you need to communicate to them by multicast, your messages (or their responses to your messages) can get lost in the noise



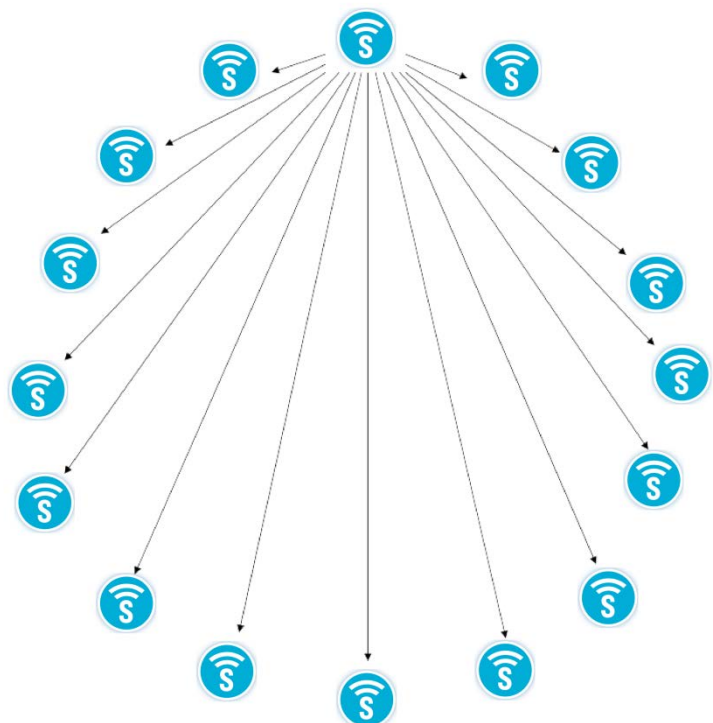
generated when all the nodes start rebroadcasting your message to make sure everyone else heard it. (Imagine how hard it would be to have a conversation in a crowded room if every time you said something, everybody else repeated it for you.)

The diagram at left demonstrates this environment, where every node repeats every message to ensure it is heard.

Depending on the specifics of your environment, there are several ways you might configure your nodes.

Shhh! Don't tell anyone!

If all your nodes will always be within broadcast range of whichever node is sending the message, you can specify the number of "hops" to be used on the multicast message. Each time a node rebroadcasts a multicast message, it decreases the remaining hop count until finally a node hears it



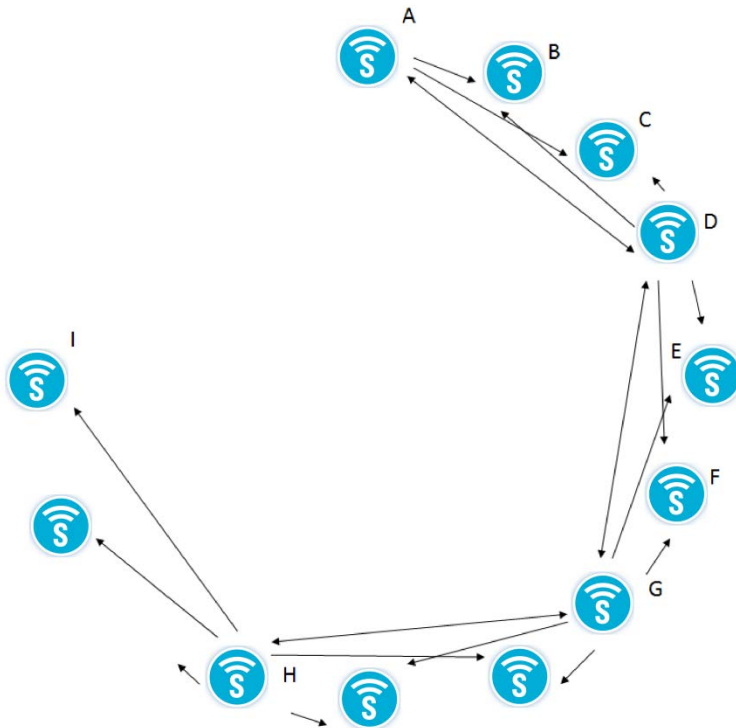
with no hops left and knows it shouldn't try to rebroadcast it. If you set the "Time to Live" (TTL) value to indicate that the message shouldn't hop at all, nobody will ever rebroadcast it so there will not be any chatter generated.

In the diagram at right, the top center node has multicast a message with the TTL parameter set so that no node will rebroadcast the request. This frees up the airwaves for the next transmission by any of the nodes without having to wait for chatter to diminish.

Be quiet while the grownups are talking!

If your network is spread out enough to require some hopping, you still have options.

In the diagram at left, assume that the nodes are far enough apart that any node can only reach nodes "three nodes away." Thus, a message broadcast by node A can be heard as far away as node D, but not by node E.



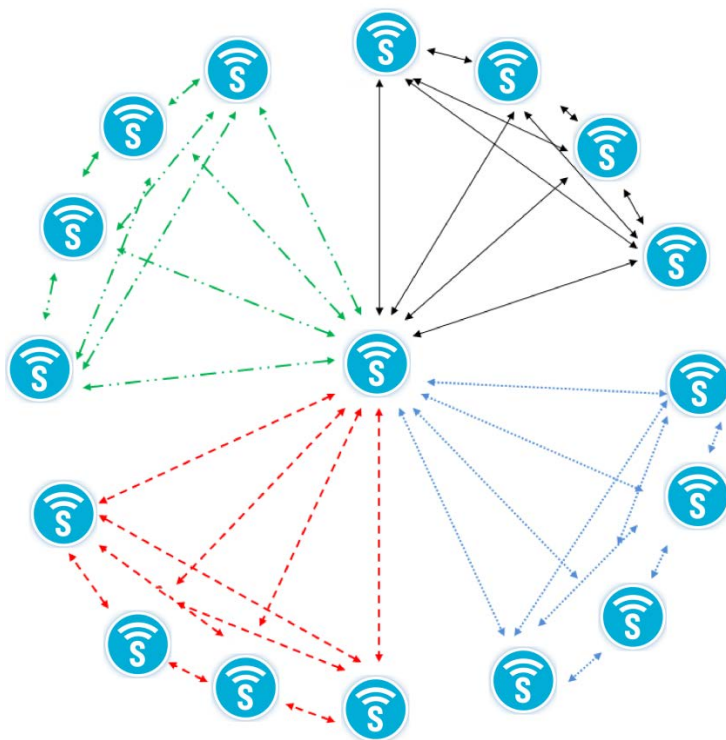
Each SNAP Node has a parameter that assigns it to one (or more) of 16 multicast groups, and another parameter that tells it which groups' messages it should make an effort to forward (if the remaining TTL indicates the message is still alive). You can use this second parameter to set most of your nodes to not forward multicast messages, leaving only a few strategically placed nodes as forwarders. This way a few nodes in your network will pass your message along, but most nodes will remain quiet. Nodes set to not forward multicast messages for a particular group can still act on messages they receive, and can still originate their own unicast or multicast messages. They also (by default) will still forward unicast messages, where appropriate. They just don't retransmit redundant multicast messages sent by other nodes.

In the diagram above, when node A sends a multicast message, nodes B, C, and D hear the message, but only node D forwards it. Nodes A, B,

C, E, F, and G hear D's rebroadcast, but nodes A, B, and C ignore the rebroadcast because they've already heard it. Of nodes E, F, and G, only G is set to forward messages, so it forwards on as far as node H (and as far back as node D, though these nodes ignore the rebroadcast). Node H then forwards on as far as node I.

Divide and conquer

If you have a central node requesting information back from a large pool of peers (such as sensor readings), sending out a single multicast request to all of them might get you responses faster than you can process them. It also increases the chances that two of the responders will try to answer at the same time, talking over each other.

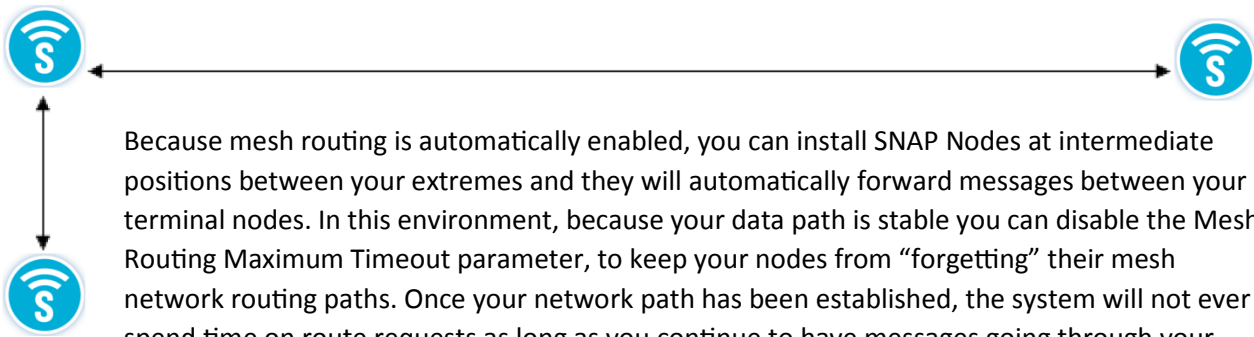


You can use the multicast group parameter, mentioned earlier, to divide your large pool of peers into smaller groups, and query those groups sequentially. Each multicast will still be acted on by every node in that broadcast group, so there won't be any need to maintain a list of peer node addresses to query individually.

Distant Data

Consider an installation where you have a control center in one location and a SNAP device connected to monitoring equipment in a remote location, not easily accessible (such as in a mine or well, or at some great distance from the control

center). It might not be possible for the two ends of your communication line to be within radio range of each other.



Because mesh routing is automatically enabled, you can install SNAP Nodes at intermediate positions between your extremes and they will automatically forward messages between your terminal nodes. In this environment, because your data path is stable you can disable the Mesh Routing Maximum Timeout parameter, to keep your nodes from “forgetting” their mesh network routing paths. Once your network path has been established, the system will not ever spend time on route requests as long as you continue to have messages going through your system.

Several Responders

In a network where you have multiple nodes that periodically “volunteer” information to the network, you might have issues where two nodes sometimes begin their transmissions at the same time, potentially corrupting both messages. In this environment, you might want to consider using the Carrier Sense and Collision Detect features in SNAP devices.

Carrier Sense tells a node to listen before broadcasting to be sure that someone else isn't talking. Once the channel is clear, the node can begin its transmission. Collision Detect instructs the radio to listen after broadcasting to try to determine if some other radio “stepped on” its transmission, and rebroadcast its message if it finds that someone did.

Carrier Sense and Collision Detect help ensure that all messages are successfully transmitted and received. In a very large cluster of nodes, this may not be the best solution, though, as all messages remain queued until communication is complete (to the extent of buffer availability). The duration of the conversation can end up being extended because you never have two nodes talking over each other. In such an environment, one of the other options to reduce the *amount* of network traffic is generally a more efficient solution.

4. Taking Control

Now that you know what SNAP is, it's time to discover how easy it is to put it to work for you. For the sake of this description, we'll assume that you're using Portal on a Windows-based PC, though you could also be using your own program, connecting through SNAP Connect, or you could be using Portal on a Macintosh or PC with Ubuntu Linux. The concepts are all the same.

While this description instructs you on how to walk through various steps, as a tutorial would, it is not necessary that you actually do so. Steps are given so you can see how easy they are, in the context of a discussion of what's happening. For more details about how to use Portal and SNAP, refer to the Portal Reference Manual and the SNAP Reference Manual. Even if you have no hardware available in front of you as you read this, you should be able to follow along to understand what the pieces are and how they work together.

As a starting point, this description assumes you will be setting up a three-node network (Portal, a bridge node, and one other SNAP Node) using two RF100 SNAP Engines, two SN171 ProtoBoard development boards, and a serial cable. In the screenshots and code samples below, the RF100 used for the bridge has an address of 00.1E.6B, and the other RF100 has an address of 00.1E.6C.¹

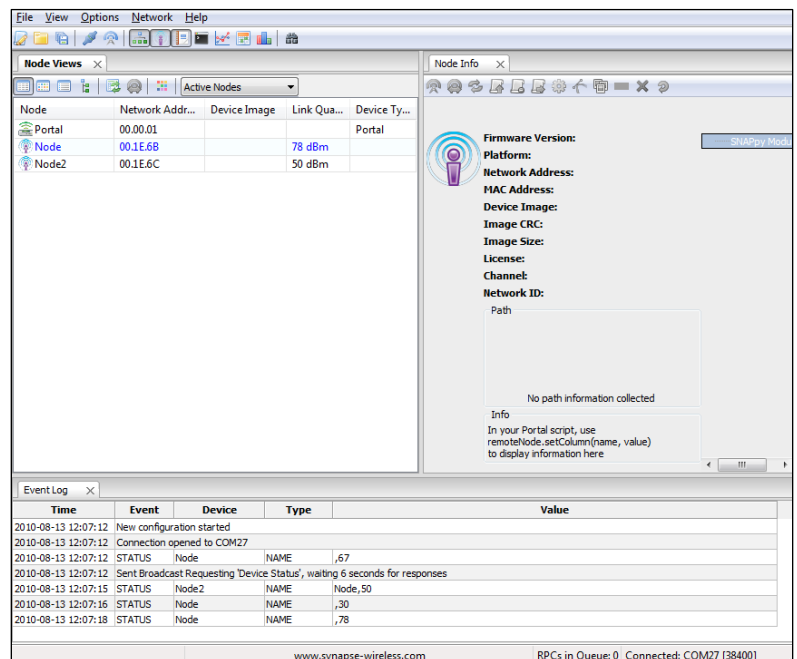
Start by installing the RF100 SNAP Engines on the two ProtoBoards and powering the boards. Connect one end of the serial cable to one of the two ProtoBoards, and the other end to your PC. (Many computers no longer include serial ports these days. It may be necessary to have a USB-RS232/DE9 serial adapter. These are readily available in the marketplace.)

Next, launch Portal. In Portal, connect to your bridge node, and ping the network. (Depending on your Portal preference settings, Portal may automatically query you to connect, and may automatically ping the network for you.) Portal provides an overview of your network. The Node Views pane (upper left) shows all the SNAP Nodes in your network. The Node Info pane (upper right) shows details about the currently selected node.

Multicasting

To begin, we'll see how SNAP devices can monitor and report events. Click in the Node Info pane, and then select File → New Script. Enter the following script in the new script editor tab that opens.

```
@setHook(HOOK_STARTUP)
def onStartUp():
    # Set pin 5 as a watched input
    setPinDir(5, False)
    setPinPullup(5, True)
    monitorPin(5, True)
```



¹ Similar code would work just as well on other SNAP hardware, such as the RF200. However the pin designations specified may not be correct for SNAP nodes other than the RF100.

```
# Set pin 1 as an output
setPinDir(1, True)
writePin(1, False)

@setHook(HOOK_GPIN)
def onPin(pin, isSet):
    # Report that a watched input has been triggered
    if isSet:
        reportButton(pin)

def reportButton(pin):
    # Print a message to STDOUT
    print 'Pin ', pin, ' was set!'
    pulsePin(1, 500, True)
```

Save the script as `watchButton.py`. Select the bridge node and click the Upload SNAPpy Image button to load the script.² Set the node to Intercept Node Output. Check that the jumper labeled S1SEL is set to connect the pushbutton on the board to GPIO5, rather than the reset pin.

Now when you push the button on the board, LED1 on the board will flash for a half second (500 milliseconds), and Portal displays the following message:

watchButton: Pin 5 was set!

If you examine the script loaded into the node, you will notice that the board is only set up to watch for a signal on pin 5. SNAP Engines have 19 pins (or more)

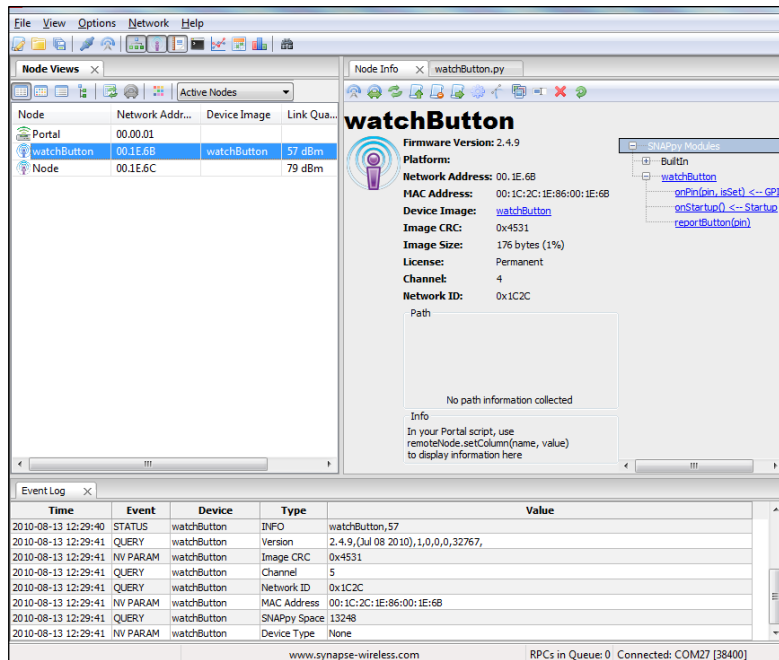
available, so you could easily have more than one pin being watched for a signal. The ProtoBoard hardware referenced in this discussion has only one pushbutton switch built in, but other signals could be added to the board's terminal blocks, or in a custom circuit you could have many more inputs triggering responses.

Now that you've seen a SNAP device reporting an event over the network, let's involve our other SNAP node in the picture. Open another new code window and enter the following script.

```
# Initialize a global variable
buttonCount = 0

@setHook(HOOK_STARTUP)
def onStartup():
    # Set pin 5 as a watched input
    setPinDir(5, False)
    setPinPullup(5, True)
    monitorPin(5, True)
    # Set pin 1 as an output
    setPinDir(1, True)
    writePin(1, False)

@setHook(HOOK_GPIN)
def onPin(pin, isSet):
```



² This discussion does not give click-by-click descriptions of all the functions mentioned. For information on which button is which, and the finer details of working in Portal, refer to the Portal Reference Manual.


```

# Act on a button press
if isSet:
    incrementButton()
    tellAFib()
    pulsePin(1, 500, True)

def incrementButton():
    # Increment the buttonCount global (rolling back to zero)
    global buttonCount
    buttonCount = (buttonCount + 1) % 19

def tellAFib():
    # Make another node fib...
    mcastGroup = 1
    mcastTTL = 2
    mcastRpc(mcastGroup, mcastTTL, 'reportButton', buttonCount)

```

Save this script as tellAFib.py, and load it into the other SNAP Device in your network.

A quick look shows similarities with the watchButton script. Both configure pin 5 as a watched pin, and perform an action when the button is pressed. In this script, though, the action it performs is three-fold. First, it increments buttonCount, a global variable, rolling back to zero if buttonCount grows larger than 18. Next, it sends a multicast message (to group 1, the default group, with 2 hops), telling any node that hears it to run its 'reportButton' function with a parameter of buttonCount — if the listening node has a reportButton() function. Finally, it flashes its LED (on pin 1) for a half second.

Make sure jumper S1SEL on this second ProtoBoard is also set to connect the pushbutton to GPIO5, and press the button on that ProtoBoard. If you haven't made any changes to your bridge node, LED1 should blink on both the remote node and the bridge node, and you should get this message in Portal:

watchButton: Pin 1 was set!

There are a few things to notice here. First of all, the Portal log entry indicates that the message came from the watchButton node. (Nodes will adopt the name of the script they contain, if they are not explicitly given a different name.) That's because even though you pressed the button on the *other* SNAP device's board, that device sent a message out that the bridge node heard, and the bridge node is the node that actually printed the message.

The next thing to notice is that the message indicates that Pin 1 was set, even though it was actually Pin 5 connected to the pushbutton. That's because the hook-invoked script on the second SNAP Device calls the tellAFib function, which in turn invokes the reportButton() function on any other node that's listening, sending the buttonCount value as a parameter. The reportButton() function on the bridge node accepts the sent parameter and prints the value, entirely unaware that the 1 is somewhat of a fib. If you press the button on the second ProtoBoard again, the process will repeat but the bridge node will have Portal print that Pin 2 was set.

Let's take this a bit further. Open another new script window, and enter the following script:

```

def reportButton(pin):
    readableAddress = hexByte(ord(remoteAddr[0])) + '.' \
        + hexByte(ord(remoteAddr[1])) + '.' \
        + hexByte(ord(remoteAddr[2]))
    print 'Node ' + readableAddress + ' reports a signal from pin ' + str(pin)

def hexNibble(nibble):
    # Convert a numeric nibble 0x0-0xF to its ASCII string representation
    hexStr = "0123456789ABCDEF"
    return hexStr[nibble & 0xF]

def hexByte(byte):
    #print a byte in hex - input is an integer, not a string
    highNibble = hexNibble(byte >> 4)

```

```
lowNibble = hexNibble(byte)
return highNibble + lowNibble
```

Save this script in the Portal directory, the parent directory of the SnappyImages directory where the other scripts were saved. Name it `revealTheTruth.py`. In Portal, select the Portal node and use the Change Portal Base File button to load the script into Portal.

There's a little bit of extra processing going on here to make things pretty. The `hexByte()` and `hexNibble()` functions assist in converting an arbitrary string value to a string of the value's hexadecimal representation. The `reportButton()` function uses these when another node calls the `reportButton()` function to take the address of the calling node (from the `remoteAddr` variable) and put it in a human-readable form.

The important thing to realize here is that now both your bridge node AND your Portal node have functions named `reportButton()`. If you press the button on your non-bridge node now, you should get two new lines in your Portal log:

Node 00.1E.6C reports a signal from pin 3

watchButton: Pin 3 was pressed!

(The lines may appear in the opposite order in your log. Also, the address of the reporting node – 00.1E.6C, in this example – will be the address of your node.)

Because the remote node called `reportButton()` by multicast, every node that both heard the message and had a `reportButton()` function available acted on the message. The Python script in Portal printed a message that included the address of the node that sent the message, while the bridge node continued to tell its little fib, as it had been commanded to.

The command that the bridge node is acting upon is another fundamental element of the SNAP protocol. In normal operation, the messages that pass between SNAP nodes are in the form of RPC calls. RPC, or "Remote Procedure Call," is a protocol for sending requests for a remote system to perform some procedure, or function. When one node makes a unicast or multicast transmission, it is really requesting that one (or every) other node run some function/procedure with the given parameters.

One node cannot tell (or ask) another node to do something that the node doesn't already know how to do. The receiving node must already have a function with the specified name in order to respond to the RPC request. If it doesn't, it simply ignores the request. (If you so choose, you can have Portal log any commands it hears for which it has no function defined.)

This is why, before it had a script loaded, Portal did not do anything when it heard the initial multicast request, even though the bridge node *did* hear and act on the request. Once Portal had a script loaded with a `reportButton()` function defined, Portal joined the party and also started responding to the multicast.

Unicasting, or Direct RPC Calls

Now that you've seen how multicast requests work, it's time to make some adjustments to your scripts to experiment with unicast requests.

Fundamentally, a unicast request is similar to a multicast request: It is a request that a remote node act on a procedure with the parameters provided. There are a few big differences, though.

First of all, a unicast request (as the name suggests) is directed to a single node, rather than being sent out for everyone to act on. That means the request must include the address of a target node, rather than a broadcast group.

Second, because a unicast defines a communication between two specific nodes (the node making the request and the node to which the request is addressed), it becomes possible to try to confirm that the message has been heard. When you are multicasting, there is no practical way of knowing who all might hear the request and act on it. So for a multicast, there is no benefit from having any kind of message acknowledgement.

With a unicast command, the requesting node first tries to find a route to the target node, routing through other intermediate nodes if necessary. Once the route has been discovered, the requesting node sends the message along that route. Along each hop of the way, the receiving node will send a small acknowledgement message back to the node from which it received the message.

If the original message is lost along the way, or if the acknowledgment is waylaid, the last node to have sent (or forwarded) the message will attempt to retransmit it. The number of retransmissions defaults to 8, but is a parameter you can adjust. Once a node receives the message and the requesting (or forwarding) node hears the acknowledgment, the communication ends for the sending node (though the receiving node might yet be expected to forward the message).

The third difference relates to the first two. Because a unicast is to a particular target, and because the route to that target node will be known (once it has been discovered), unicast calls do not include a TTL value, or number of “hops” to transmit.

Let’s rework the script in the remote node to make unicast calls instead of the RPC call. Make the following changes to the tellAFib.py script, and save it as tellAFibUnicast.py:

```
# Initialize a global variable
buttonCount = 0

@setHook(HOOK_STARTUP)
def onStartup():
    # Set pin 5 as a watched input
    setPinDir(5, False)
    setPinPullup(5, True)
    monitorPin(5, True)
    # Set pin 1 as an output
    setPinDir(1, True)
    writePin(1, False)

@setHook(HOOK_GPIN)
def onPin(pin, isSet):
    # Act on a button press
    if isSet:
        incrementButton()
        tellAFib('\x00\x1e\x6b') # Address of your bridge node
        incrementButton()
        tellAFib('\x00\x00\x01')
        pulsePin(1, 500, True)

def incrementButton():
    # Increment the buttonCount global (rolling back to zero)
    global buttonCount
    buttonCount = (buttonCount + 1) % 19

def tellAFib(targetNode):
    # Make another node fib...
    rpc(targetNode, 'reportButton', buttonCount)
```

Load this script into your remote node.

The changes to the script are highlighted, above. Let’s look at what these changes mean.

First of all, the tellAFib() function now requires a targetNode parameter, the address of the node to which the message will be sent. That parameter is used in the rpc function call to send the request along its way.

The next thing to notice is that instead of `mcastRpc()`, the script now uses a function called `rpc()` to send the unicast request.

The other change is in the `onPin` function, where we invoke `tellAFib()`, now with an address parameter, then increment the button variable again, and then invoke `tellAFib()` a final time, this time with the address of Portal. `'\x00\x00\x01'` is the default address of Portal, though it may have been changed in your implementation. The `'\x00\x1e\x6b'` address in the sample code should be the address of the bridge node. If you are performing this test yourself, you should insert the address of your bridge node.



For SNAP Engines, you can find the node's address on the Engine's label, as the last three bytes of the device's MAC address. If you are building your own hardware, MAC addresses will be provided as part of your license. On the SNAP Engine shown at right, the node address part of the MAC address is shown circled in red.

With this updated script in your remote node, if you push the button on the ProtoBoard you should get the following two messages in your Portal event log. (This assumes you still have STDOUT intercepted for your bridge node.)

```
watchButton: Pin 1 was pressed!  
Node 00.1E.6C reports a signal from pin 2
```

Now you can see that your bridge node reports that it has been told to indicate Pin 1 has been pressed, and it dutifully does so. Portal then relays the message that the remote node has reported a signal from pin 2.

If you push the button on the ProtoBoard used for your bridge node, it should still consistently report that Pin 5 has been pressed. The code in that node hasn't changed, and is still truthfully indicating what has happened on that board. Because that message is not unicast or multicast anywhere, the `reportButton()` function in Portal is never asked to do anything with the information, so Portal does not add any log entry for the event (other than the entry printed to STDOUT by the bridge node).

As a final check, close Portal and disconnect your serial cable from your bridge. Even though you are not connected to a computer anymore, your nodes continue to run their scripts and communicate with each other. To test this, press the button on the device that used to be your bridge node. Nothing will appear on your monitor, of course, but you should see LED1 on the ProtoBoard blink for a half second with each button press. Now press the button on the other ProtoBoard. You should see LED1 blink on both boards, as the remote node blinks its own LED, and the (former) bridge node blinks its LED when trying to print a button status.

Other Programming Options

Built-In Functions

The scripts in this demonstration use the `rpc()` function, the `mcastRpc()` function, and several other built-in functions (`setPinDir()`, `setPinPullup()`, `monitorPin()`) to initialize and configure SNAP devices. These functions are part of the API available to SNAP users. There are more than 70 built-in functions available for use in SNAP devices. They provide a foundation you can use in your own scripts to read and change pin states, adjust radio strength, access external devices (SPI, I²C, serial, etc.), and interact with the rest of the network.

You can find a complete list of these built-in functions, with explanations of how to use each one, in the SNAP Reference Manual. You can also find a wide variety of sample scripts installed with Portal. These scripts demonstrate how to access hardware features in the various SNAP Engines. These scripts are installed read-only, but you can save copies of them in order to experiment with them.

Each of your SNAP devices can have its own SNAPpy script loaded, allowing for tremendous power and infinite customization of your network. Nodes can have different functions in them to perform different tasks, or multiple nodes can have the same script in them to behave in similar ways. As the demonstrations above showed, you can also customize functionality by having different scripts in nodes with functions with a common name that perform different tasks.

Even with identical scripts loaded, you can make use of non-volatile parameters in the nodes – memory locations that are preserved when the nodes are shut down – to make nodes behave in different ways. This can simplify maintenance of scripts by having a single script to use across many nodes, while allowing for customized operation at the node level.

Portal Scripting

When running Portal your computer also counts as a SNAP device, and can also be extended through scripting. Just as with other SNAP devices, you can add new functions to Portal that you (and the other SNAP nodes) can call. What makes Portal special is that it can run any Python program you provide.

Portal scripts are written in full Python, rather than the smaller embedded SNAPpy subset. Python is a very powerful language, which finds use in a wide variety of application areas. Although the core of Python is not a large language, it is well beyond the scope of this document to cover it in any detail.

You won't have to search long to find an immense amount of information regarding Python on the Web. Besides your favorite search engine, a good place to start looking for further information is Python's home site:

<http://python.org/>

The Documentation page on Python's home site contains links to tutorials at various skill levels, from beginner to expert.

As mentioned earlier, Portal acts as a peer in the SNAP network, and can send and receive RPC calls like any other node. Like other nodes, Portal has a Device Image (script) that defines the functions callable by incoming RPC messages. Since Portal runs on a PC (or Macintosh), its script executes in a full Python environment with access to the many libraries, services, and capabilities available there. You can also find an application note on Portal Scripting on the SNAP forums.

5. Where Do I Go From Here?

From here, you have a world of options. Where you go next depends on how you want SNAP to help you.

SNAP Evaluation Kits

If you want to see more examples of SNAP and SNAPpy at work, consider acquiring one of the SNAP Evaluation Kits (if you haven't already done so). Each SNAP Evaluation Kit provides several SNAP Engines and an assortment of demonstration boards, along with tutorial documentation that walks you through setting up your network and making it respond to your commands.

EK2100

The EK2100 evaluation kit includes two RF100 SNAP Engines, an SN132 SNAPstick USB Module, an SN171 ProtoBoard, and a collection of components to walk you through experiments that demonstrate some of SNAP's potential. It provides a great introduction to SNAP's capabilities.

EK2500

The EK2500 evaluation kit includes three RF100 SNAP engines, an SN132 SNAPstick USB Module, an SN111 End Device board, and an SN171 ProtoBoard, plus associated connectors and accessories. This evaluation kit allows for more advanced demonstrations, with features like sensor connections and the addition of a seven-segment display on the SN111. Having three SNAP devices to work with (plus your PC running Portal) allows for more elaborate network evaluations.

EK2550

The EK2550 evaluation kit includes the same hardware that the EK2500 evaluation kit provides, but is packaged with AES-128-capable firmware.

Other SNAP Documentation

Once you have your feet wet, the next step is to review the other SNAP documentation.

The SNAP Reference Manual explains all the details necessary for using SNAP and SNAPpy, in Synapse hardware or in hardware of your own design based on processors to which SNAP has been ported.

The Portal Reference Manual provides a complete explanation of all the features of Portal, which you can use to administer and manage your network.

The SNAP Connect E10 User Guide explains how to establish a network around the E10 device, which acts as a bridge between your wireless SNAP Nodes and other networks of SNAP Nodes anywhere you have Internet access.

Custom Solutions

When you realize that SNAP devices will be the key to solving your problems but come to the conclusion that you don't have the expertise or capacity in-house to make everything work, the Synapse Wireless Custom Solutions Group may be the way to go. Our team of hardware and software engineers can work with your company to provide the technology to develop solutions and get your products in place quickly and cost-effectively.

Contact Synapse Wireless at sales@synapse-wireless.com for all the information you need to put SNAP products to work for you.