Concert Venue Tunes in to Cloud-Managed Wireless

Cisco Meraki solution brings greater flexibility and efficiency, plus higher Wi-Fi revenues, to the Capital FM Arena

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Capital FM Arena

Industry: Sports and Entertainment

Location: United Kingdom

Challenge
· Improve wireless network and services

Solution
· Cisco Meraki cloud-managed wireless LAN

Results
· Wireless services easier to set up and change according to demand

· PCI-ready network enables introduction of ticket-scanning system

· Revenues from public Wi-Fi usage rise substantially

Challenge

The Capital FM Arena is one of the premier concert venues and ice rinks in the United Kingdom. Yet, despite the proliferation of mobile devices, the venue's Wi-Fi network was an afterthought.

"We used to arbitrarily install access points every time a new requirement for wireless came up," says Rob Williams, IT director at Capital FM Arena. "It was a very haphazard approach, and with each new access point, it became more and more difficult to manage them all."

Over the years, this approach resulted in the accumulation of about 30 disjointed access points from a variety of vendors. Trying to manage all those access points was a big drain on IT resources. "With the ever-increasing demand for Wi-Fi, we needed a simpler solution," Williams says.

While attending an IT Directors Forum, Williams met Reed Sheard, CIO at Westmont College in Santa Barbara. Sheard had recently replaced his Aruba wireless LAN with over 300 Cisco® Meraki access points (APs), and he recommended Cisco Meraki for the Capital FM Arena. The cloud-managed Wi-Fi solution, Sheard explained, would provide centralized management and high performance without increasing cost and complexity.

Solution

Williams visited the Cisco Meraki website and tried the live demo of the company's web-based management dashboard. "I got it within seconds," he says. He followed up the demo with a request for free evaluation equipment, and soon received a set of Cisco Meraki 802.11n wireless APs. "Configuring new service set identifiers on the access points felt like I was playing. It put the fun back into IT!"

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Rob Williams
IT Director
Capital FM Arena
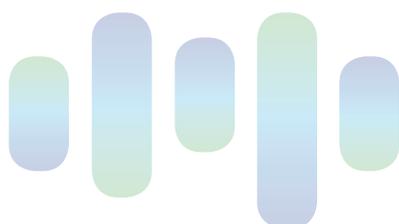
> "The demands and types of users accessing the network increase significantly when there's a concert taking place. I love the fact that I can enable and disable concert SSIDs as required with one click and from anywhere."

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One by one, all the old wireless APs were replaced by Cisco Meraki enterprise-class cloud-managed 802.11n APs. "Normally the physical installation of access points is the easy part and configuration the difficult bit, but Cisco Meraki has totally turned that on its head," says Williams.

Results

Williams can now create multiple service set identifiers (SSIDs) in seconds, configuring the network remotely over the web. Depending on the concert schedule, the arena has its access points configured to broadcast up to five SSIDs: public, guest, staff, backstage-production/artist, and backstage-crew, all with different authentication and access control policies.

"The demands and types of users accessing the network increase significantly when there's a concert taking place," Williams says. "I love the fact that I can enable and disable concert SSIDs as required with one click and from anywhere."

Williams was pleasantly surprised to discover a new revenue source following the Cisco Meraki deployment: "We made more in public Wi-Fi revenues in one day, with Cisco Meraki cloud-managed access points, than we did in eight years through our previous managed network provider."

The robust wireless infrastructure has also enabled the arena's senior management team to introduce company-owned iPads in parts of the venue. "Using iPads during meetings would never have been possible or considered without the ease and control provided by the Cisco Meraki dashboard," Williams says.

After the resounding success of the first Cisco Meraki deployment, Williams is now looking to upgrade to a wireless ticket-scanning system. In preparation, he asked a payment card industry (PCI) consultant to review the network to see what needed to be done. "When I showed him the dashboard, and in particular the PCI reporting tools, he was impressed. Our network is good to go," says Williams.

Williams, an avid technology blogger, admits that Cisco Meraki has made him a cloud convert. "I hated the buzz-word 'cloud', but Cisco Meraki has completely changed my opinion of that now; it finally makes sense to me!" he says. "The solution has got to be my favourite product in IT over the last 20 years; it truly is amazing."

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Meraki Cloud Managed Wireless solutions, please go to www.cisco.com/go/meraki

Product List

Wireless

• Cisco Meraki Cloud Managed Wireless Access Points