Some Cisco locations are smaller or short-term rented offices where the number of employees and devices doesn't justify a full branch-office networking solution. In these offices, we use Cisco® Meraki™ appliances for network access, which gives us a cost-effective, and cloud-managed connectivity solution that is quick and easy to deploy. Cisco IT is planning to deploy Meraki for network connectivity at about 100 sites worldwide.

We have currently designed two solution configurations based on the number of users and devices to be connected. In offices with up to 10 employees, we use the MX65W appliance as a single-box solution that provides wireless, security, and routing for access to the Internet and the Cisco network. The pre-configured appliance can be installed by a local employee, who simply locks it into place on a desk then connects to the facility's Internet service.
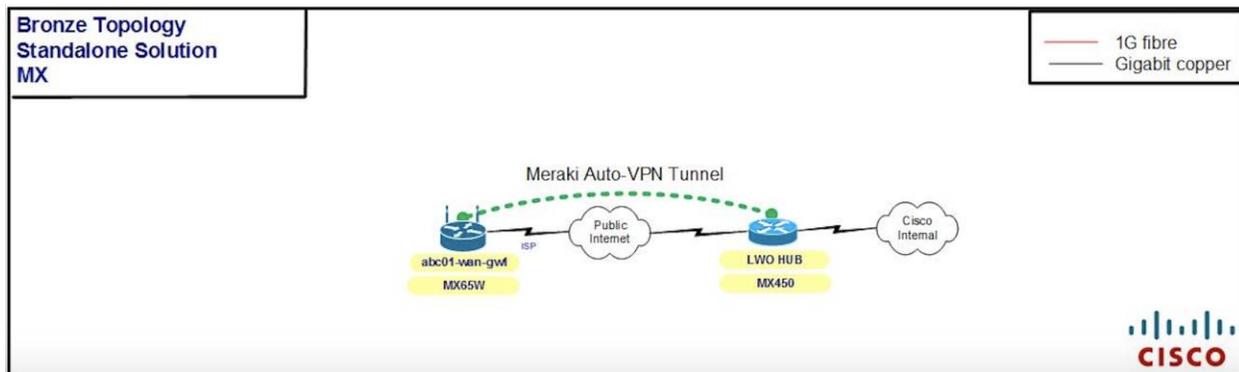
The extended configuration supports up to 25 employees as well as more access points when needed to deliver adequate wireless coverage and performance. This configuration uses a Meraki MX65 appliance, two Meraki MS120-8FP access switches, and two Meraki MR53 wireless access points. The components can be rack-mounted in the facility's communications room or delivered in a lockable, wall-mounted cabinet for placement in the office.
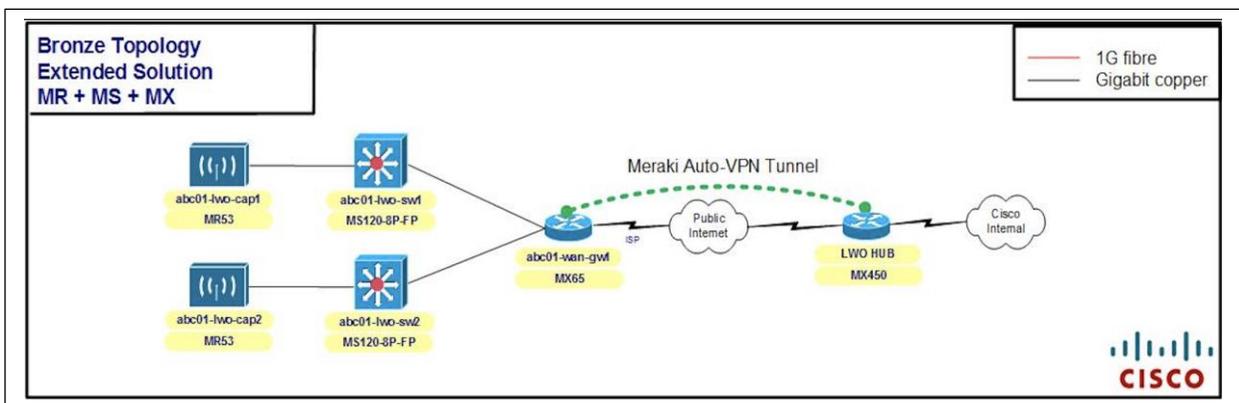
Five remote Cisco offices are the first to receive the new wireless connectivity solution, which we plan to eventually install in approximately 100 Cisco offices worldwide. "Although we designed this new wireless solution primarily for short-term rented spaces, we will also use it in our company-owned small offices," says David Laban, Network Engineer, Cisco IT. "The Meraki appliances give us new options for branch offices so we can make the most cost-effective choice based on office size and the communications capabilities those employees will need. We can also use it to bring network connectivity to a site in need of a quick fix, when we really need it."

Fast Network Connectivity in a Disaster

For example, Cisco used this small-office solution to quickly restore network connections for 60 Cisco employees who were displaced by a fire in our Montréal office. In this case, the Meraki MX65 devices also supported the live video communications of Cisco Webex Room Series and DX Series video endpoints with no performance issues reported.

Benefits of a Small-Office Solution for Cisco

Using Cisco Meraki products for small-office connectivity offers several benefits for our business and operations.

- Faster and lower-cost office setup because the device does not need to be installed by a technician. We're able to deploy remote-office network connectivity quickly because we can ship the equipment within a few days and the physical setup is as simple as plugging-in the cables. The simplicity also means we don't need to send a network engineer to the site in order to configure the device, which saves time and operational costs.

- The devices selected for this solution have a small form factor, meaning they do not need to be installed in a physical rack. They are also silent, so they can be placed in a common working area without distracting employees.

- A centralized, cloud-based management dashboard simplifies device deployment, troubleshooting, and updates for Cisco IT. The network configuration can be completed on the dashboard before the hardware is connected, then it will be downloaded to the device automatically when the remote office employee plugs it into the local Internet connection. If the device is stolen, we can use the dashboard to remotely disable it and erase the configuration.

- A consistent feature set across the Meraki platform simplifies IT operations and support, and allows for an easy transition if the office needs to install a new appliance to accommodate more space or employees.

- Cisco can open new offices quickly because wireless access and use of an existing Internet service in the facility means we don't need to wait for installation of structured cabling or a dedicated circuit in the office. Deploying a Direct Internet Access (DIA) connection or using the facility's existing Internet service is cheaper and quicker than using a private MPLS circuit. Ordering and installing a MPLS circuits can take as long as five months. In contrast, DIA can be arranged in less than a month and the facility's Internet service is available immediately.

Cisco is also evaluating the MX65W appliance as the new standard device for Cisco Virtual Office (CVO), our solution for employees who work from home. The CVO use case will also get all the benefits offered by Meraki, including ease of deployment and centralized cloud management for operations.

For More Information
Cisco Meraki products