Cirencester College

Provides students with dependable WiFi across 14-acre main campus notorious for poor 3G coverage

- Beacon status sixth-form college rolls out full WiFi coverage across 14-acre campus

- 100+ Meraki wireless APs installed in 2 weeks

- 1,800 students plus staff enjoy fast, reliable WiFi connectivity for the first time

- Intuitive Meraki dashboard enables staff to simply configure wireless network with college-branded splash page

- Free over-the-web firmware upgrades provide future-proof solutions

Established in 1991, Cirencester College provides sixth-form education to around 1,800 students studying a diverse range of academic, vocational, recreational and skills-related courses. The main campus is located on the outskirts of Cirencester in the southwest of the UK, with two further premises in the surrounding areas. In recent years the college was awarded 'Outstanding' status by Ofsted as well as the impressive Beacon status.

Neil Sperring was appointed as Director of Information Services at Cirencester College at the start of 2012. "When I joined, the entire ICT at the college needed an overhaul," he said. The college

had recently deployed Netgear APs, but they weren't satisfying requirements. "Our existing wireless wasn't giving us full coverage and it really wasn't coping well with the high density of clients," Sperring explained.

Sperring sought counsel from neighbouring colleges to supplement his own knowledge on wireless vendors. "Initially we were interested in Xirrus but then I came across Meraki and was amazed by the online dashboard; the Layer-7 visibility and control alone is incredible," said Sperring.

Cirencester College took advantage of Meraki's free evaluation program and trialled two cloud-managed wireless access points.

"We really subjected the evaluation APs to some strenuous testing, even opening them up to guest access," Sperring said. "They coped with the demand effortlessly every time, without any degradation in performance."

The college worked with technology reseller, The MJC Group, to complete a site survey, which suggested that around 100 Meraki APs would be required to provide coverage for the college's buildings and sports fields. "To be honest we were sold on Meraki after seeing the dashboard, so after the site survey we put together a 3-phase rollout plan," said Sperring.

The first phase was a pilot deployment of 30 APs covering two college buildings, in order to test configuration settings. "The first 30 APs were all online in under a week because all that was required was literally to plug them in, it was that simple!" Sperring said.
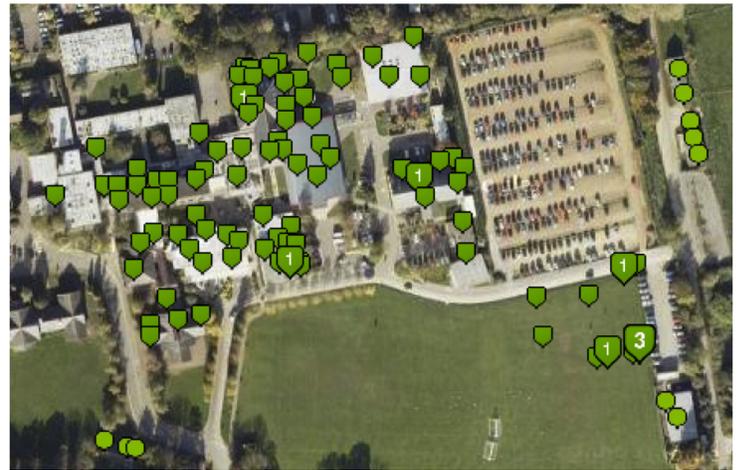
> "Normally when you do a project like this you expect some glitches but everything worked the first time – Meraki is the easiest and most enjoyable wireless deployment I've ever done!"

–Neil Sperring, Director of Information Services, Cirencester College

"The Meraki solution was incredibly easy to configure. Once we had designed how we wanted our wireless networks to operate, it was a simple case of adding the access points to our account and deploying them," said Andrew Carpenter, IT Infrastructure Analyst at Cirencester College. Meraki's cloud managed APs automatically download their configuration settings from the cloud meaning each AP could be up and running in minutes. Moreover Meraki's technical support is included within the license fee to ensure installation as smooth as possible. "When we did have questions, the technical support from Meraki was exceptional and always very helpful," said Carpenter.

Following the success of the first phase, Sperring consolidated the next two phases into one. After a two-week period to test configuration settings on the pilot APs, the remaining 70 APs were all installed in a week. "Normally when you do a project like this you expect some glitches but everything worked the first time – Meraki is the easiest and most enjoyable wireless deployment I've ever done!" commented Sperring.

Cirencester College have their wireless network setup to broadcast 2 SSIDs: one for college owned devices, which is hidden, and one for staff and students. Students and staff authenticate to the network by entering their Active Directory credentials via a splash page, with

the SSID restricted from the LAN and peer-to-peer applications. "Using the dashboard is extremely easy. Without any training, we were able to configure things like a Cirencester College branded splash page, deny LAN access and peer-to-peer applications," said Sperring. Guests can access the network in the same way as staff and students, using Active Directory login credentials issued by reception.

All students and staff across Cirencester College's vast 14-acre campus now enjoy reliable WiFi access. "It's obvious from walking around some of the student common areas that they are embracing modern technology, and the wireless provision from Meraki is playing a key part in that," explained Carpenter.

Wireless access is important to most students nowadays but especially so to those at Cirencester College, Sperring noted. "The area of Cirencester is notorious for not having particularly good 3G coverage, so consistent wireless was really high up on our students' agenda."

Cirencester College have invested £2.4M in a new 24-classroom building, which is being added to the main campus. "When the new building is finished, the cabling will be completed already, so getting it live with WiFi will be even quicker than before," said Sperring.

Sperring's plans for Meraki at Cirencester College don't stop there, however. He also plans to deploy Systems Manager, Meraki's free cloud-based mobile device management solution for PCs, Macs, iOS and Android devices. "We have about 700 college-owned laptops and another 30 iPads that will be increased to 50 next year," Sperring said. "We're paying for Airwatch's MDM at the moment, but we've started to transition over to Systems Manager and we'll completely switch over to Systems Manager in the New Year."