

Small Business Wi-Fi Solutions – Ease of Management is Key

Many small businesses in the Chicago metro area face the same challenges with their Wi-Fi. Consumer-grade hardware is commonplace. Performance is often poor. And management is usually a pain. These issues get even worse as small businesses grow. But there is hope.

Challenge #1 – Consumer-Grade Hardware

When it comes to Wi-Fi networking equipment, there are a wealth of options on the market. These are all over the map with regards to cost, features, reliability and so on. A major pitfall facing small businesses is trying to work with subpar equipment. They may have purchased their equipment at the local big box store or via a cheap online retailer. While this hardware may have been adequate early on, it shows its weakness as the business grows.

In almost every case, the problem is not that the hardware is bad in and of itself. Instead, the issue is that it was never meant for a business environment in the first place. Features that make it amazing for home use are insignificant or downright harmful when used in a business setting. Often the first step in fixing a small business Wi-Fi network should be to replace this consumer-grade hardware.

There are many options when searching for small business Wi-Fi solutions. One key player in the market is Cisco Meraki which is renowned for its reliability, performance and ease of management.

Challenge #2 – Poor Performance

It is no secret that many small businesses struggle with poor performance from their Wi-Fi. This may come in the form of slow speeds or terrible range. If Wi-Fi was just an afterthought, this may not be that big of an issue. Yet, Wi-Fi is becoming a core offering used to bring more customers through the doors. Also, businesses are becoming more wireless themselves. In other words, poor Wi-Fi performance is no longer something that can simply be ignored.

As mentioned, Cisco's Meraki equipment can be a perfect choice to fix poor Wi-Fi performance. It provides intuitive settings to optimize traffic by prioritizing key applications or websites and making better use of available

bandwidth. It also dynamically configures its radios to avoid interference and improve reception and range.

Challenge #3 – Painful Management

Many small businesses have multiple locations, aging hardware or nonexistent IT departments. At worst, they may have some combination of these. Either way, the result is the same. Wi-Fi network management becomes a time-consuming and frustrating chore.

Again, this is an area where Cisco Meraki can be helpful. Cisco's enterprise-grade products have historically required extensive specialized training. But Meraki products are designed with the small business in mind. They are built on an intuitive online dashboard that is completely managed in the cloud. This means that no extra on-site equipment is needed to manage them.

Additionally, the Meraki hardware has been designed with multi-location businesses in mind. It provides a map overview of the physical location of each access point. It automatically syncs configuration settings between locations. And it provides remote diagnostics and automatic monitoring and alerts. Opening a new location or replacing old hardware is easy since the Meraki equipment will provision itself automatically via the cloud. It can even automatically configure a site-to-site VPN tunnel between each location for added functionality and security. This is a massive boon for small businesses that have to manage and maintain multiple physical storefronts or offices.

Meraki products can even help small businesses manage their smartphones and tablets via built-in mobile device management – even if the devices are away from the network. This can improve security by enforcing encryption and passcodes on each device as well as allowing administrators to lock or wipe devices if they are lost or stolen.

On top of the above features, Meraki products also provide analytics features that allow small businesses to track how many new and repeat visitors they have and how long the average visitor stays on site. Administrators can even enable Facebook authentication when a visitor connects to the Wi-Fi network to target them with social media marketing. This data can then feed into the business' CRM or customer tracking software via the Meraki API. In turn, this can help track things like loyalty programs or target visitors with real-time offers.

Better Wi-Fi Makes Business Sense

The benefits provided by products like Cisco Meraki directly impact the bottom line of small businesses. They can run more smoothly with fast and reliable Wi-Fi. Customer satisfaction can be improved leading to more frequent or longer visits. Perhaps most importantly, IT and management staff can save significant amounts of time with easy-to-use interfaces that are designed with the small business in mind. In the old days, Wi-Fi was an afterthought. Today, it is an asset.

Techie Support