

Improving the congregation experience by improving wireless availability

Cisco Meraki Success Story



Technology



Lifecycle

When Chesapeake Church needed scalable infrastructure to meet the needs of its growing congregation, Plan B Technologies and Avnet delivered the Cisco solution that improved wireless connectivity and provided key insight into the IT environment. As this modern church continued to embrace technology, it was able to host more people in different functions throughout the week and successfully launch a new mobile application.

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SR. PASTOR ROBERT HAHN
CHESAPEAKE CHURCH

Growth initiatives at Chesapeake Church required infrastructure improvements

[Chesapeake Church](#) in Calvert County, Maryland, sought to improve community outreach and congregant attendance. As part of this plan, they opened an on-campus coffeehouse, the lobby coffee bar and cafe accessible to church and community members alike, expanded fundraising and outreach events as well as created their own mobile application to provide users access to a personal Bible, events calendar, on-demand sermons and more.

“For us to connect with our congregation we needed to make sure that they could be digitally, when they’re with us,” said Sr. Pastor Robert Hahn of Chesapeake Church. “We needed to be sure that when we launched our application, or had a concert with nearly 2,000 attendees or even just had congregates gathering at The Lobby Coffee Bar and Cafe, that a strong wireless connection was available for them.”

Hahn realized in order to accomplish his goals for Chesapeake Church, he must overcome limitations with legacy IT infrastructure and implement scalable wireless connectivity throughout the campus.

The multi-pronged initiative would more than double the number of people frequenting the progressive church – many of whom were expected to be teenagers and young adults. Sr. Pastor Hahn understood that these demographics are often much more technologically savvy and would want wireless access for their mobile devices. Located in a rural area, many people both at the church and in the surrounding area have challenges establishing a 3G or 4G connection via their phone providers. Providing a wireless connectivity option within the church campus would be a draw for these anticipated new congregants and contribute to Hahn’s vision of the church as an open and welcoming community gathering spot.

Assessing the legacy environment

Chesapeake Church brought in Avnet partner [Plan B Technologies](#) for a consultation to discuss goals and expectations for the infrastructure updates. The church had sporadic connectivity from legacy internet wireless access points that were independently managed. Some areas had great coverage while other areas had nothing. Legacy hardware issues made it challenging for even church employees to go online or send emails. Upgrading the system would not only provide scalable WiFi for new congregants but would also improve day-to-day responsibilities of the staff.



However, transforming the church from its current state to what Hahn and his team envisioned would be a major undertaking. The amount of software and equipment that was required to manage the environment and satisfy all of their requirements could have cost a fortune. "This isn't a huge corporation, it's a church," stated Donnie Downs, President and CEO of Plan B Technologies. "We had to find a solution that would deliver what they needed, within budget. Fortunately, thanks to our partnership with Avnet, we knew of an offering that could be a perfect fit."

Acquiring and deploying Cisco Meraki

Through its partnership with Avnet, Plan B Technologies had become familiar with many wireless technologies, including Cisco Meraki, a cloud-managed WiFi, routing and security offering.

"Really without the three of us [Avnet, Cisco and Plan B Technologies] the Chesapeake Church project wouldn't have been successful. At Plan B Technologies, we learned about the offering and developed an understanding of how to position Meraki and how it works with other technologies because we would attend events run or sponsored by our partner's Avnet and Cisco. When the time came to deploy Meraki, we acquired the technology from Avnet," said Downs.

Handling surges of activity with improved, scalable infrastructure

Within just two hours of implementing Cisco Meraki, Chesapeake Church began to notice positive change with greater connectivity at The Lobby Coffee Bar and Cafe, auditorium and throughout the remainder of the campus - all leading up to the launch of the new application.

The launch of the new mobile application was the perfect way to test the strength and scalability the church's improved IT environment. When the application was announced to congregants during an on-campus event, 71 GB were downloaded across the network within the first six hours, without any connectivity or bandwidth issues.

Sr. Pastor Hahn was delighted in the successful launch, "[The application] is a fantastic tool to reach people; the content we are providing is spiritually and intellectually important for our congregants and the community. It would have been awful if our infrastructure hindered that delivery in any way. We spent so much time and energy creating and launching this app that congregants want, if they then couldn't obtain the app because we skipped an important step, it would have been devastating."

Cisco Meraki delivers key insight into connected endpoints

Cisco Meraki provided key insight into the different endpoints throughout the network, a benefit that wasn't completely understood until after integration. Even troubleshooting, for example, became much easier and quicker.

During one of the first events run after implementation, The Lobby Coffee and Bar employees noticed issues when taking food orders. Normally, order requests would be taken on an iPad behind the front counter then sent to a connected iPad in the kitchen, but the kitchen was not receiving data. With the new solution, they were quickly able to uncover the issue - the iPad in the kitchen had two wireless profiles under the same SSID. The extra profile was deleted which then fixed connectivity and allowed for successful order transmissions.

Before, an issue like this would have taken much longer to identify and remedy while the work of taking orders for hundreds of people and running them to the kitchen would have had to be completed manually.

"The metrics and heat maps we're getting on the back end have really made this worth our investment," concludes Sr. Pastor Hahn. "We are able to see all connected devices and how they are performing, down to a laptop, tablet or phone."

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