Alliant International University

"Nobody could offer us anything as fast for anything close to [Meraki's] price."

George Zlatanov, Senior Network Infrastructure Engineer, Alliant International University

Challenge

IT directors needed an affordable solution to provide wireless internet to students and faculty at six campuses

Cisco and Aruba solutions were deemed too expensive by the university CFO

IT engineers could not manage all six campus networks remotely Students constantly complained about poor connections

Results

All six campuses now have centrally managed WiFi at 20% of the cost of other vendor solutions

IT department has received zero complaints

Entire campus network deployed in less than a day

All branch campuses now managed remotely

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The IT team at Alliant International University had a unique challenge: creating a WiFi network for its 3,500 students across six campuses that stretch from San Diego to San Francisco.They also had a university administration that wasn't willing to invest tens of thousands of dollars for a solution with high ongoing operating costs.

Senior Network Infrastructure Engineer Geroge Zlatanov and Alliant CIO Pat Miller ordered demo units from Aruba Networks and Linksys

One of Zlatanov's colleagues had heard of Meraki and pointed them in that direction. It wasn't long before they had several Merakis in hand for a trial. "The access points were very attractively priced," said Zlatanov. "But what really sold us was the Dashboard. The wireless switch interface is hosted by Meraki, and no one else had anything remotely like that." This time, Alliant's CFO was sold and gave the green light.

The initial deployment at the Los Angeles campus took just a few hours and cost less than $6,000. Additional deployments on other campuses were executed by local campus IT staff, and Zlatanov configured each campus Meraki network remotely. "Painless," he says. Now the WiFi networks are unified on Zlatanov's desktop, manageable from one spot.

One especially valuable, and unanticipated advantage, says Zlatanov, is the way the hosted management architecture sends him an email whenever a node goes dark. On a long holiday weekend when usage was light, a Cisco router on the network failed. Before a single complaint arrived in his inbox, Zlatanov received an email from Meraki reporting a problem. In hours, Zlatanov and his IT team were on-site and had diagnosed the failure. Once the Cisco router rebooted, the entire Meraki network was back on-line.

Zlatanov knows that no news is good news when it comes to hearing from students about their Internet experience. "You know students - they're never happy." That is, until Zlatanov and his IT team deployed Meraki wireless networks at all six of the university's California campuses.

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routers from Cisco, and deployed them on the Los Angeles campus. Almost immediately, they realized the solution was labor-intensive to deploy and expensive to maintain, but they didn't see an alternative. "They were hard to manipulate, they all had static addresses, and they all needed power adapters. You had to connect each one to power and an Ethernet cable, and program them individually," Zlatanov said. When a node went down, Zlatanov would learn about it via a flood of complaints from students and faculty. He'd hunt down the culprit one access point at a time, and reboot it manually.

When Miller and Zlatanov pitched the Cisco and Aruba solutions to the University's CFO, they were shot down. "The price tag was $80,000. Our CFO said, 'No way, come up with something cheaper.'" Having had Plan A and Plan B cancelled, Miller and Zlatanov said they started looking for Plan I "for Plan Inexpensive."

Like any IT chief, Zlatanov knows silence is like beautiful music. "If I don't hear from students, that must be because they have nothing to complain about!" he said. "They are happy because it just works. And of course, because it is free."

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