Applebee's Grill & Bar deploys guest WiFi nationwide, will use splash pages to connect with customers

- ▸ Multiple franchisees deploy Meraki 802.11n APs in 200+ Applebee's nationwide
- ▸ Meraki's built-in stateful firewall prevents access to cardholder data, ensuring PCI compliance
- ▸ Plug and play access points and built-in centralized management simplify multi-site deployment
- ▸ Meraki Traffic Shaping and Client Fingerprinting provide visibility and control over remote networks
- ▸ Customized click-through splash pages provide targeted messages to customers
- ▸ Eliminated separate Internet connection for guest WiFi, resulting in significant cost savings

Diann Banaszek, Marketing Partner for Apple American Group LLC, thought it would be a great idea to offer guest WiFi at Applebee's Grill & Bar – and to use click-through splash pages to share targeted messages with customers.

With approximately 270 Applebee's Neighborhood Grill and Bar restaurants nationwide, Apple American Group LLC is the largest Applebee's franchisee and the second largest franchisee of any type in the world. And with a youthful target audience, Banaszek felt that guest WiFi was a must.

"For one thing, customers expect you to have it," Banaszek said. "It's important to be current. But we're also looking for new friends on Facebook, seeking ways to get customer email addresses, and of course we have messages we want to get out, such as our Girls' Nights Out or our late night half-price appetizers."

A number of Apple American Group Applebee's restaurants already offered guest wireless through consumer-grade access points. But when problems arose, Network Administrators Leslie McMasters or Rick Holley would get a call.

"We didn't even know the restaurant's WiFi providers, but we were expected to fix the WiFi," McMasters said. "It became clear that we needed the same network from one location to the next, so that we would know how to deal with it. Plus, there was the reporting piece. Is anyone using the wireless? How much bandwidth is being used? We didn't know."

Banaszek was also concerned about what people were actually doing on the various networks. "Since we had no landing page, we had no

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- Leslie McMasters,
Network Administrator, Applebee's

opportunity to ask people to agree to terms," she said. "Now, not only can we monitor the amount and type of use, we can also ensure that the system is being used appropriately."

Applebee's started testing Meraki 802.11n access points (APs) in

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California and quickly expanded to other markets. Because the Meraki APs are plug-and-play and the network is managed through the cloud, McMasters and Holley can monitor the network from anywhere.

"The restaurant managers could install the APs without on-site IT," McMasters said. "The Meraki dashboard makes it easy to manage the WiFi across all the restaurants, and we have the visibility we wanted."

"Connectivity has been stable," Holley added. "And now we know how many users are connecting and with what kinds of devices."

The entire network is PCI compliant. Guest traffic from the Meraki access points goes directly to the Internet, and Meraki's built-in stateful firewall prevents this traffic from accessing the cardholder data environment (CDE).

> "Customers expect you to have WiFi. And being up to date is part of our brand."
>
> - Diann Banaszek,
> Marketing Partner, Apple American Group LLC

All network bandwidth is shared, so Holley uses Meraki's integrated application-aware traffic shaping to limit bandwidth for traffic such as peer-to-peer, online backup, and web file sharing. Holley also uses Meraki's SSID availability to restrict guest access to particular hours.

"Everything was easy to set up," Holley said. "It's pretty intuitive."

Applebee's is also working on a variety of customized click-through splash pages for different marketing campaigns. Relevant splash pages with time-sensitive discounts will be linked to different SSIDs, which will broadcast at lunch, dinner, or late-night.

"We're giving the customer the benefit of more information," Banaszek said. "The Meraki dashboard lets us see that we have more smart
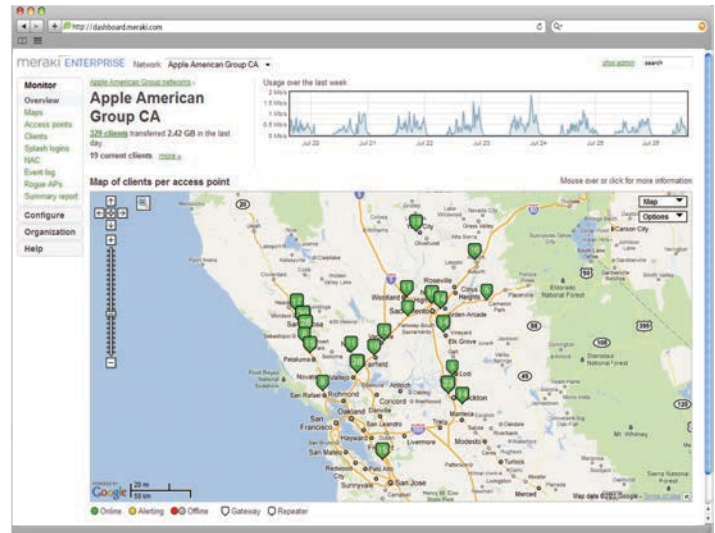
The Meraki dashboard simplifies multi-site network management.

phones and handheld devices on the network, along with some iPads. So we need to tailor our offers to be clear on the small screens."

Applebee's hopes to start using the wireless network for handheld tableside order entry and payment in the next few months. In addition, other vendors such as Muzak, Tap Dynamics (a beer monitoring system), the energy management system, and the jukebox system may utilize the wireless to eliminate hard wires.

So far, Apple American Group LLC has deployed Meraki 802.11n APs across 28 Applebee's locations, with plans to expand to another 60 restaurants in the next month and more thereafter. Including other Applebee's franchisees, over 200 Applebee's restaurants offer their guests Meraki WiFi.

Applebee's markets the free amenity on entry doors and tables, and it's clearly working – over 8000 distinct clients access Apple American Group's network every month, transferring over 80 GB of data. "Being up to date is part of our brand," Banaszek said.