

Burton and South Derbyshire College deploy campus-wide WiFi to offer students flexible studying



Burton and South Derbyshire College (BSDC) in the UK has been successfully nurturing its students to achieve their personal goals for over 60 years. Today the college supports more than 11,000 students

and offers 500+ courses from entry-level programmes to degree-level qualifications. As well as achieving exemplary results (99% pass rate for A-Levels), BSDC prides itself on its modern facilities.

"A lot of the staff members have iPads or smart phones and, of course, the students have a plethora of mobile devices so it was really a natural progression to upgrade our WiFi capabilities" comments Vaughan Dyche, Head of IT at BSDC.

BSDC worked with their technology partner, Jade Communications, to evaluate various vendors and shortlist them to Aerohive, Cisco, Meru and Meraki. Each supplier was invited to the college to present their proposed solution. Judging was based on a range of functionality criteria such as guest and private network management, access control and cost. "Meraki stood out for us among the supplier presentations – the functionality of the dashboard was fantastic and incredibly intuitive" explains Ian Robinson, Network & IT Manager at BSDC.

"We were really impressed with Meraki and confident that it was the right solution for us" said Dyche. BSDC went on to deploy around 100 Meraki cloud managed wireless APs across its main Lichfield Street campus as well as The WorkShop and Shobnall Sports Centre sites.

Highlights

- Over 11,000 students across three campuses served by 100 Meraki cloud managed access points and three Meraki MX security appliances
- Multiple SSIDs integrated and managed through Meraki's web based dashboard
- College branded splash pages used for staff/student and guest login
- Entire network managed without dedicated staff

The network now requires zero dedicated staff, with 3 team members managing the network when needed. "Using the Meraki Dashboard is so straightforward and intuitive. We didn't need any training to create and manage SSIDs" said Robinson. BSDC has 3 SSIDs configured at the main Lichfield Street campus: corporate, BSDC and guest. Staff and students authenticate to the BSDC SSID using log in credentials and guests are required to register their details to be authorised for access. "The BSDC and guest login pages were created using the custom themed splash pages built into the Meraki dashboard and we even have our college logo uploaded" explained Robinson.

Guest access is granted to local contractors while they're completing work on-site. "To ensure our network isn't congested with guest traffic outside of business hours, we use the SSID availability feature on the Meraki dashboard to only broadcast the guest SSID between 7am-5pm, Mon-Fri" said Robinson.

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The initial tender for BSDC was for wireless coverage across the main campus. However, BSDC expanded the deployment to include Meraki MX security appliances, after seeing the power of their multi-site networking features. “We realised how simple it was to setup and manage site-to-site VPN through the Meraki dashboard so we decided to expand the network to include three of the college’s sites” said Robinson.

BSDC has had the Meraki APs and security devices successfully deployed for over a year now. “The WiFi is extremely reliable, students are able to study on comfy sofas instead of desks and we’ve really had nothing but positive comments from staff and students” said Dyche.

“I’m going to sound very cliché but Meraki is the gift that keeps giving! The automatic firmware upgrades are fantastic; they feel as though they’ve been custom-built for us, and they’re included in the license-fee!” said Robinson.