Love Every Moment

Serving with pride since 1898

Mitchells & Butlers

- Centrally managing over 1,700 restaurants, pubs, and corporate offices
- Using wireless, switching, endpoint management, and security & SD-WAN
- Small IT team now able to focus on improving customer experience

Mitchells & Butlers (M&B) is one of the largest operators of restaurants, pubs and bars in the UK. Responsible for brands like All Bar One, Harvester, Toby Carvery, O'Neills, and Browns to name a few, M&B uses Cisco Meraki to centrally manage their networks across 1,700+ locations. We interviewed Matthew Parsons, Head of Architecture & Security at M&B, to find out more about how they combined Cisco Meraki wireless, switching, endpoint management, and security & SD-WAN to build a resilient infrastructure which provides complete visibility and control over the network.

The Network

M&B's incumbent infrastructure provided very limited insight and control. The IT team was unable to see basic information such as whether an issue sat with an access point, switch, or ADSL connection, for example. The team didn't know the performance of individual devices or applications and couldn't see an overview of the network at a location or country-wide level. Coupled with the fact that all network equipment had to be managed locally, simple troubleshooting was extremely difficult, time-consuming, and expensive.

When upgrading their infrastructure, it was imperative that M&B's IT team were able to gain insight into network performance and monitor which applications were in use. M&B also wanted to avoid a

spread of technology across multiple vendors and were looking for a simple solution with end-to-end traceability. Cisco Meraki was an ideal fit.

In addition, M&B wanted to be able to create a blueprint network for their pubs and restaurants. Not only would this allow them to quickly and easily set up existing sites and scale to new sites without having to configure each network individually, it would remove the need for them to understand each individual setup in order to troubleshoot. Meraki configuration templates have also allowed M&B to improve the way they upgrade software across their estate, as they use templates to roll out updates one brand at a time ensuring devices are up-to-date and secure, without incurring any downtime. A process which used to involve writing custom scripts and using complicated third party tools is now a quick and efficient task.

"A network that just works."

— Matthew Parsons, Head of Architecture & Security

With Meraki, software updates are rolled out automatically and contain proactive security enhancements. Being able to protect against new security threats on an ongoing basis is invaluable for M&B, who often handle sensitive data and rely on an internet connection to process orders and take payment.

Security & SD-WAN

With M&B's ability to take payment and trade so dependent on a secure and reliable internet connection, along with increased use of cloud-based mission-critical applications at HQ such as Office 365 and Skype for business, M&B needed a resilient solution that they could depend on. The reputable Cisco brand, coupled with the Meraki security and SD-WAN capabilities was what ultimately convinced M&B that Cisco Meraki was the solution for them.

Cisco SD-WAN, powered by Meraki, allows businesses to manage more than one external network connection such as MPLS, broadband, and fiber optic at a given location based on its performance. In a matter of clicks through the Meraki dashboard, the M&B IT team can define which WAN link an application should use, or set up rules for which link should be used depending on performance.

"Cisco Meraki gave us exactly what we were looking for from an SD-WAN solution"
— Matthew Parsons, Head of Architecture & Security

Each M&B site has two WAN links, one for guest Wi-Fi and one for corporate traffic and services. With Meraki MX security & SD-WAN appliances, M&B can leverage each connection to maximize availability and ensure coverage. "If we lose a corporate services connection, we want to be able to continue trading across the guest wireless network, and still be secure. Meraki delivers just that" says Matthew. All M&B have to do is simply set up the preferred WAN link, the performance threshold, and the failover link, and Meraki SD-WAN will automatically optimize connections for a top quality, consistent connection. Meraki MX security & SD-WAN devices also come with integrated LTE, which M&B are using as a failover option at their higher-earning sites to protect against physical breakages in traditional connections.

Conclusion

Like many Cisco Meraki customers, M&B's IT team has found that having a reliable network allows them to focus their efforts on improving the business. Whether it's making operational efficiencies like prioritizing payments over guest Wi-Fi, or supporting front-of-house initiatives like order-at-table with the use of iPads, one thing M&B's IT team does not have to focus on is keeping the network up and running. In the future, M&B may look to add Meraki Insight to their stack, which will allow them to identify and protect against issues arising beyond the LAN.