Individual Restaurant Company

- UK restaurant company using technology to create new business opportunities
- Standardising on Cisco Meraki networking, SD-WAN, and endpoint management
- Increased customer loyalty and revenue growth after implementing Cisco Meraki

INDIVIDUAL
RESTAURANTS

Specialising in seasonally inspired cooking and committed to customer-first attitude, Individual Restaurant Company (IRC) is one of the UK's leading restaurant companies. IRC has an extensive collection of over 50 restaurants in cities throughout the UK, including Piccolino, The Restaurant Bar & Grill, Bank Restaurant & Bar, and Gino D'Acampo My Restaurant and My Pasta Bars.

IRC continually looks for ways to better serve their customers, while simultaneously creating new business opportunities and growing its reputation as a great business for employees. With Cisco Meraki, the six-person IT team, led by IT Director Adam Purslow, has played a crucial role in transforming the restaurant experience and increasing revenue, from launching a customer loyalty program to optimising on-site operations and bookings.

The initial challenge

As part of a company refresh focused on enhancing on-site experience and encouraging staff to spend more time with customers, IRC began piloting mobile point-of-sale systems (EPOS). The IT team decided to use iPad minis to accomplish this, but their existing wireless solution struggled to handle the devices roaming throughout the restaurant.

Based on a recommendation, IRC decided to trial Meraki MR access points in the terrace area of one of their restaurants. Using the fast client roaming technologies built into the cloud-managed APs, the restaurant iPads were able to maintain a strong signal as employees and guests moved around the property, regardless of their proximity to the APs. "It worked so well that we decided Meraki was for us," said Purslow.

Standardising on the Meraki full stack

After an initial pilot phase, it took IRC about 8 months to roll out Meraki to all of their existing sites. Over 50 restaurants now rely on Meraki wireless, and whenever IRC adds a new terrace or a new restaurant, Meraki is the solution installed. Meraki cloud-managed switches, security appliances, and endpoint management are also included in all new deployments. This provides IRC with a complete

end-to-end view of their IT infrastructure from one centralised dashboard.

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-- Adam Purslow, IT Director

Connecting distributed sites under one dashboard

"Meraki is so easy — I would have the data team, who was running cables, send me the Meraki serial numbers. I'd enter those numbers into dashboard and that was it," explained Purslow. The IRC team could deploy 5-6 sites in a day. "Configuring a new location was down to seconds by copying a config and renaming it," Purslow said.

In newer locations, Meraki MX64/65s security appliances with Advanced Security licenses perform a number of tasks, from ensuring network security to connecting locations via software-defined WAN. Using the SD-WAN functionality, the IT team can use bandwidth more efficiently, balancing usage between internal needs and guest experiences. "We can put it all together properly and establish parameters and prioritise based on our needs," said Purslow. "If guests aren't using it, the internal side can. On weekends, when internal use is low, bandwidth is shifted for guests, preserving the customer experience."

In addition to the SD-WAN benefits, the MX also provides end-user security through filtering of unwanted content categories, intrusion prevention (IPS), and Advanced Malware Protection (AMP). From here, a combination of Meraki indoor, outdoor, and high-density MR53 APs are connected to the MX appliances via Meraki switches with per-port management and security capabilities.

The Meraki APs provide per-client or device type bandwidth limitations, Layer 7 firewall and traffic shaping rules, as well as customised usage settings. One feature, an SSID availability scheduler, immediately started saving costs for IRC. Local residents were using a restaurant's network after hours, driving up costs with their ISP. In just a few mouse clicks, the IT team configured the SSID to turn off when the restaurant closed.

With up to 15 SSIDs per network, Purslow and the team can segment employer-owned devices from guest devices and other connected restaurant systems. IRC uses Meraki Systems Manager endpoint management to track the company iPads and push out up-to-date, customised profiles. These company devices use a secure login for

the network, while IRC's guest SSID is separated from the local LAN and routes through a captive portal, directing customers through a customisable splash screen.

Adding business value with IT

Meraki has provided IRC with additional business value in a variety of surprising places. According to Purslow, "Since we started rolling out the captive portal, which advertises the loyalty program, membership has increased by 75,000 new customers." This easy-to-deploy feature has greatly expanded the company's reach in a very short period of time.

Many of IRC's restaurants are popular with businesses and as venue rentals, but the poor quality of the previous network meant they often missed booking opportunities. With the new, reliable network, they have been fully booked, increasing overall profits and garnering positive reviews on social media.

As a company committed to putting the customer first, IRC is always looking for ways to enhance the customer experience. In addition to providing reliable wireless, they are piloting in-store Macs for guests to use during their visits. Previously, it would have been impossible to control the content guests can access, but with Meraki the IT team has peace of mind to roll out this new experience.

IRC has also extended their reach using the point-to-point capabilities of outdoor APs. For example, at one of their locations, an overflow seating area was separated from the main restaurant by a strip of council land, which could not have cable passed over or under it. Instead of isolating these guests and rendering the EPOS unusable, the IT team set up a pair of outdoor APs in each area and created a mesh connection to service the space.

Continued growth and innovation

So what's next at Individual Restaurant Company? Purslow and the IT team are already looking for new ways to streamline IT, create additional business opportunities for IRC, and take customer experience to the next level. "The next phase is looking at tying our app and other programs to capabilities like Bluetooth, location analytics, and APIs, which are already built into the Meraki solution," explained Purslow.