Tourism Holdings

- NZ tourism company deploys Meraki MR, MS, MX, & Systems Manager
- Segmenting network for 1000 daily guests & staff is a breeze in Meraki dashboard
- Instant network alerts ensure issues can be resolved quickly from anywhere

Known as the number one recreational vehicle (RV) rental company in the world isn't a bad place to be. With over 1,000 employees and more than 50 locations around the world, Tourism Holdings (THL), a New Zealand-based tourism company, rents out its 6,000 RVs to travelers in New Zealand, Australia, the US, and the UK. THL also leads tours for up to 1,000 guests each day through the Waitomo Glowworm Caves in North Island, as well as on its black water rafting adventures — two of New Zealand's most popular tourist adventures. Offering the true Kiwi experience for tourists is a key value behind the organisation and the Meraki full stack solution helps the team create long-lasting memories for its guests.

Since 1984, THL has been expanding its business through acquisitions and diversification so it's safe to say the team is always looking to improve its infrastructure to best suit the needs of the business. Out of the head office in Auckland, Mark Taylor is the ICT Manager at THL, with a total of about 30 people in IT — 20 of whom are on the development side and nine on the IT production and operations side. Out of the nine, five look after the Meraki network infrastructure in place.

Prior to Taylor joining THL, he hadn't used the Meraki web-based dashboard before, but upon inheriting a Meraki network that was seamless, simple to use, and offered immense visibility, Taylor commented "This was my first Meraki. I'm really pleased to have inherited this network. Just to have that visibility. If I sum it up in one word, it's visibility."

The journey with Meraki began in 2014, when one of the IT staff attended a security seminar in Australia. A Cisco representative initially pointed him towards Meraki Systems Manager, Cisco's enterprise mobility management solution, offering the ability to manage thousands of corporate devices from a single dashboard. The IT staff member began by enrolling THL's Australia-based devices into the dashboard and was "blown away with the fact that everything was visible in one simple dashboard." It was also an opportunistic time as auditors were visiting THL that same month and it took less than a minute to provide them with a list of devices in a single consolidated list. The team saw this as a success and officially kicked off the full deployment of Meraki. Joining the 1,100 Systems Manager licenses already in place was a robust network consisting of 67 MR Access Points (APs), 49 MS Switches, and 16 MX Security Appliances.

Long gone were the days of a disparate multi-vendor network of different firewalls, modems, routers, and switches. The team quickly said goodbye to lack of visibility, inconsistencies in the network, as well as the many complex consoles that were being used. The in-house team then completed the entire network refresh on their own over the course of 2 months.

Today, the Meraki MR APs offer Taylor and his team the ability to create separate SSIDs for corporate staff and guests, and use tools including bandwidth throttling to limit the items that can be downloaded. The team also segments the 1,000 or so daily guests to prevent them from using the bandwidth needed by the corporate staff to achieve optimal day-to-day operations. The data and application usage information found in the dashboard provide the team with a better sense of how

to segment the network. There has been a true correlation between client data and strategic business decisions at THL since adopting the Meraki solution. Additionally, as THL's staff travel frequently between countries and branches, the MR APs have provided some beneficial behind-the-scenes features that employees may oversee. For example, the ability to go from one office to another and maintain instant connectivity to the network is a great asset for employees, while also saving IT tremendous time and resources.

Though the MX Security Appliances have content filtering and traffic shaping actively being used, Taylor mentioned that he wants to work on making the filters more consistent across offices to ensure that everyone has the same network experience from bandwidth to restrictions. Site-to-site VPN is also used for staff to access applications and as the team continues to move the organisation to more cloud applications, there will be decreased need to be on-site to access certain docs and files. From an end-user perspective, as all THL devices are enrolled in Systems Manager, the best tool that Taylor has employed has been the ability to see the different operating systems to plan for upgrades, and ultimately make sure that THL is operating on a minimum number of environments.

"Having the ability to do everything remotely in a user-friendly way is a key benefit."

– Mark Taylor, ICT Manager

As Taylor walked through the Meraki network in place, he paused to compliment the alerts that can be set up with a few clicks in the dashboard. "We have a lot of alerts coming through. Unfortunately, some locations are more remote and have bad power sources. Before Meraki, we wouldn't know a site lost power, but now we have the ability to know what's actually happening at a branch office." The Meraki dashboard can send instant alerts to administrators' emails so no one is left in the dark and issues can be mitigated or resolved speedily.

Next, Taylor plans to spend some time on a project to make sure the entire network, from AMP to content filtering, is consistent across all networks. Additionally, with one team member in Australia, the one who started the entire Meraki revolution at THL, staff have a bit of additional support when it comes to working hours. However, the upcoming Meraki deployment to THL's US-based branches will allow the team to have "follow the sun" coverage, rather than just 8-5 support, which is something Taylor is greatly looking forward to. Enabling rotating staff members to flexibly be on call and access the network dashboard from home at any time to troubleshoot remotely was an ask that was previously impossible, but now is as easy as can be.