Barfoot & Thompson Real Estate

Customer Relationships are Enhanced with Mobile Workforce Applications

Challenges

- Vendor network selection that would confidently result in ease of deployment, reduced cost, superior technology and reputation
- Ensuring WiFi network could compliment and work with existing wired network
- Complexities associated with multiple device management throughout the company including BYOD and Corporate-owned devices
- Wi-Fi network needed to be compatible with the Mobile Workforce applications already developed, as well as ongoing applications in the pipeline.

Results

- Mobile applications with high performance connectivity have increased Agents' productivity while operating with the utmost integrity, regardless of location
- Centralised management and zero-touch deployment has significantly reduced deployment time and cost, and enabled quick problem resolution
- Distributed nature of the WiFi architecture has resulted in a very good fit with existing wired network, leveraging services from Head Office as well as running independently

Back in 1923, a man called Val Barfoot bought a tiny, run-down Newmarket land agency for just £75 and called the company "V. Barfoot Land Agent". In 1934 the Barfoot brothers were joined by Maurice Thompson and in 1940 the business became "Barfoot & Thompson" as we know it today.

From those small beginnings in Newmarket, Barfoot &Thompson quickly grew to become Auckland's Real Estate market leader with one in 3 houses sold by one of their real estate agents. There are now over 60 offices throughout Auckland and Northland supporting over 1850 staff. For more than 85 years spanning across 3 generations, they've remained steadfastly family owned, whereby they pride themselves on operating with integrity and building successful client relationships.

"We invited several suppliers to present WiFi options and we assessed each proposal on technology, price, reputation, and method of installation. The Aerohive solution was a clear winner which made our decision easy."

—Simon Casey
CIO, Barfoot

The Challenge

Priding themselves on putting client relationships at the forefront of everything they do, Barfoot & Thompson were planning to deploy smartphone and tablet applications which would ensure that their highly mobile workforce could continue to operate with the utmost integrity. In particular, a Property Management tool that would allow their rental team to appraise properties using their iPhones, ensuring accurate form filling supported with photos. To support the deployment of these new applications, they found themselves in need of a new wireless technology.

In addition to supporting mobile applications, finding a way to reduce infrastructure costs was another motivator behind Barfoot & Thompsons' switch to integrating Wi-Fi with its existing wired network. Also, as part of their risk management strategy, they wanted to ensure that the Wi-Fi network could leverage services from Head Office, but also run independently if necessary.

Another requirement was that they needed to be confident that the wireless network could manage the complexity of over 2000 mobile devices, including a portfolio of BYOD and Corporate-owned devices. This management of a large volume of devices was critical – a scalable way of adding devices to the network as required would ensure productivity for their mobile workforce.

Simon Casey, Barfoot & Thompson CIO says "in a highly competitive industry we want our agents to find it easy to use the latest mobile tools and connectivity to help run their business and maintain communication with their customers. We needed a technology partner that understood how important it is that we reliably support our workforce and provide them with the tools they need".

Also necessary was finding a zero-touch solution that did not require the IT team to travel to our branches for deployment or ongoing management - this meant valuable cost-savings could be made, a need that Aerohive was able to meet. "It means that every time a new employee comes on board, we can set them up remotely – which saves us time and money" said Casey.

The Solution

Barfoot & Thompson were introduced to Aerohive through their systems integrator Datacom who were integral in the design of the new wireless network. After evaluating several options, Aerohive was chosen – they were easily the best fit due to the distributed nature of the Aerohive architecture.

In addition, the planning stage and deployment were able to happen within months of each other. Planning was throughout February 2011, with deployment beginning in August 2011. The Aerohive network and deployment easily copes with over 2000 mobile devices being added. Datacom was able to do site surveys and supply of Aerohive equipment, with Barfoot & Thompson actively involved in project management. Throughout, Aerohive has been directly involved with key areas such as configuration and training.

Barfoot & Thompson implemented a combination of access point models AP120 and AP320. Also included was the Hive Manager for zero touch deployment and centralised management and administration.

The Results

With the Aerohive WiFi network now in place, Barfoot & Thompson agents have excellent network connectivity. With the success of mobile applications like the Property Management tool that allows their rental team to appraise properties using their iPhones, Barfoot & Thompson can be confident that their mobile workforce is delivering accurate record keeping for their clients. Agents can take photos on their Smartphone's as well as fill in the appraisal, and then upload back to Head Office via the secure wireless or wired network.

In the pipeline are applications that continue to ensure Barfoot & Thompson prioritise client needs. A Supra Lockbox application is now in place whereby Agents use their smartphone, in combination with the Aerohive WiFi network, to access a property's lockbox which holds the home owner's key. This means Barfoot & Thompson can guarantee a high level of client security and an audit trail of which agent has accessed the lockbox, and therefore house.

Mobile application developments for smartphones and iPads are ongoing to ensure their mobile workforce stays at the top of their game.

Aerohive has also reduced the complexity of managing multiple devices that come with a mobile workforce. The cloud-based solution with zero touch deployment means that Barfoot &Thompson can deploy and manage any additional access points and devices, as well as provide updates – all through Aerohive's Hive Manager. Costs savings are a given – with reduced travelling time required by their IT Department, and quicker support available, their agents can focus on what they do best.

Casey said "We wanted to be able to control and manage the network, and to troubleshoot any problems from Head Office. With so many devices to manage throughout the company it has been invaluable being able to resolve issues quickly, reducing the downtime of our mobile workforce".

He concluded: "We had an open mind when we went looking for a corporate grade Wi-Fi solution. Our goal was to deliver Wi-Fi capability into all of our offices before there was significant user demand. We knew the demand would come because of the smart phone and iPad revolution combined with our plans to deploy mobile business applications including the Supra Lockbox system, Live Agent property inspection application and Barfoot & Thompson's iPad application. The Aerohive solution has enabled our mobile application visions to become real," says Simon Casey, Barfoot & Thomson CIO.