Bavaria Film GmbH

Bavaria Film: Aerohive WLAN offers improved mobility and interactive information for tourists and other visitors

Challenges

- Cost and complexity of previous system
- Very large, dispersed site with different buidings creating a challenging environment for RF signal
- Create a stable WLAN for the studios, office buildings and approximately 300,000 film tour visitors every year
- Maximize employee mobility

Results

- System can easily be administered by a small IT team
- Flexible and scalable WLAN architecture
- Approximately 10-20% savings over a controller-based model
- Less time on installation and training
- Greater corporate mobility
- Improved visitor dialogue and interaction during TV shows

About Bavaria Film

Bavaria Film GmbH is one of Germany's leading film and TV production service providers. Established in 1919, the company and its subsidiaries operate in all major media centers of the German-speaking countries, including Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg and Leipzig. They serve all the major segments of the film and TV industry.

Bavaria Film GmbH is a holding company that contains production, service and licensing companies. The Group produces movies and TV series for public and private-sector clients. Its diverse production and licensing services cover almost the entire value chain of film and TV production.

Its productions include many of the German-speaking region's most popular TV series.

"Aerohive has reduced the administration and training workload for our IT team, and users don't even give it a second thought because it just works. There were hardly any implementation problems, and it's been easy to get support."

—Thomas Singbartl,
IT manager, Bavaria Film GmbH

Background and Challenges

Company-wide WLANs are becoming increasingly important in all industries, but they are particularly essential for a major media company like Bavaria Film which must offer a reliable network connection to its employees, customers, visitors, producers and actors from anywhere. WLANs are also playing an increasing role in TV audience interaction and social TV. Bavaria Film wanted to be prepared for this trend.

The first challenge in planning this project was providing WLAN coverage at specific locations over Baviaria Film's relatively dispersed site. The site covers 30 hectares and approximately 90,000 square meters of buildings, including a large campus, several housing and office complexes, studios and outdoor lots. Consequently, the WLAN needed to be carefully planned.

Bavaria Film needed a flexible, cost-effective, user-friendly and scalable solution. The key issue was how to provide improved network quality and stability at the desired locations without making the technology even more complex than it already was.

Solution and Accomplishments

The Aerohive architecture is simple, scalable and secure. The core of the wireless network is HiveManager,which unlike other enterprise WLAN models has no central controller and is a browser-based management interface. This interface allows switches and access points (APs) to share their configuration data. It also lets you manage devices while they are operating.

The second major advantage of the Aerohive solution is "distributed control" technology, which uses protocols to shift control to access points and switches. It uses smart access points that share network settings and control information. The company currently has around 90 access points, but IT manager Thomas Singbartl says that number is set to increase. "We're gradually implementing and expanding the system. We started with a relatively small installation and investment in a single studio about two and a half years ago, and we're now phasing in more access points. Aerohive gave us the flexibility we needed to implement the system in this way."

The absence of a central controller with Aerohive saves on high licensing costs and reduces downtime because there is no single point of failure without central nodes (controller). This simplifies troubleshooting because if one access point stops working, the rest of the swarm takes over until it is replaced, and the system as a whole is not affected. In addition, Aerohive reduces the IT department's administration and training workload.

"We needed an uncomplicated system that could be managed by a small team," Singbartl explains. Bavaria Film has just three network administrators. Their version of HiveManager was initially hosted by an Aerohive reseller, but they have since switched to the on-premise solution.

The team has achieved one of its main goals: improving mobility within the company. The Aerohive architecture provides all users and departments with a stable, flexible and high-performance WLAN. Employees have anywhere, anytime mobile access to the internet, and contractors and customers can use it on a "bring your own device" basis. "A reliable WLAN is an absolute must these days," Singbartl says. "Our staff want to be mobile rather than depend on cables or network boxes, especially since some laptops don't even have an Ethernet connection any more. So even a single minute of network downtime would be a problem for us. People simply can't work if they don't have internet access."

The new infrastructure also benefits the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit Bavaria Film Studios each year. As they are guided around the site, they can go online and access high-quality background information about the films and TV series, exhibits, company history and other topics.

The Aerohive system also lets audiences interact with programs using their own devices as a second screen. WLAN plays a major part in many of the company's most important shows, turning viewers into active participants by letting them vote, comment and share content.

The Future

The company has made significant progress with its innovative project to add iBeacons to the WLAN. These use Bluetooth low-energy technology (BTLE) and WLAN to simplify the ongoing dialog between Bavaria Film and its visitors. For example, they can send tailor-made, multimedia push notifications such as trailers, videos, images and other information about the exhibits to visitors based on where they are located. The goal is to make the already popular film tour even more interesting and interactive.

Aerohive: The Benefits at a Glance

- High flexibility, pay-as-you-grow scalability
- Add access points when needed. These manage themselves using shared protocols
- Easy to administer due to cooperative control technology (no central controller)
- WLAN architecture is fail-safe, since it has no single point of failure