General Communication, Inc.

GCI Partners with Aerohive to Offer Customers Fully Managed Enterprise Wi-Fi for Value Beyond Connectivity

Challenges

- Identify wireless solution provider with specific advantages for MSPs
- Standardization across the company for cloud networking solution
- Increase operational efficiencies for managing multiple clients
- Remove complexity and efficiently manage wireless connectivity for customers from end to end

Results

- Aerohive provides an innovative and forward-thinking MSP partnership program
- GCI values Aerohive's agility and innovation, enabling technical and commercial flexibility
- New market opportunities emerge from a scalable and seamless business model
- GCI can not only deliver Managed Wi-Fi services, but leverage Aerohive to offer additional value-added services and insights

About General Communication, Inc. (GCI)

GCI is the largest Alaska-based communications provider, offering a full range of wireless, data, video, voice and managed services to businesses, government agencies, education, healthcare and residential customers. Founded in 1979, the company continues to expand its product and services portfolio, focusing on solutions to optimize and secure networks and systems, support mobile workers and provide proactive system management. With over 2,300 employees, GCI recorded annual revenue of $979M in 2015.

As a Management-as-a-Service (MaaS) provider, GCI offers multiple services to enterprises and businesses to create efficiency and business value including Managed Wi-Fi, managed firewall, and end-to-end network management services

Due to the unique nature of the markets served, including harsh conditions and remote geographies, customers rely heavily on GCI to meet complex communications requirements. The expertise at GCI transfers to other locales facing challenging environments, and the company has offices across Alaska, Seattle, Spokane, Houston Portland and Washington DC servicing national clients in a variety of locations.

The Challenges

Several years ago GCI began to hear from more and more customers wanting to outsource enterprise Wi-Fi. As the number of devices exploded, and as wireless became mission-critical and more complex, many GCI customers did not have in-house expertise to manage an expanding WLAN. With many crucial devices connected to Wi-Fi, issues with poor network performance were a huge pain point for GCI customers and required a lot of time and expertise to resolve. In addition, customers were overwhelmed with security issues and how to leverage Wi-Fi to better understand patrons and guests. Many customers were asking for a co-managed MSP model, allowing GCI to provide managed services and support, but also enabling the customer to have full visibility and control into the network.

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> **—John Barnhardt**,
> Solutions Architect, GCI, Inc.

GCI began offering a managed firewall service 13 years ago that was very appealing to its healthcare and education customers. A natural extension of offering services like firewall, video and voice was to propose additional managed services for wireless networking. Customers wanted GCI to manage enterprise Wi-Fi from design and planning, to deployment, cloud management, as well as customized services and a unique portal called the Hub that gives customers visibility into their services. Customers wanted Wi-Fi to be outsourced, and GCI needed to partner with an agile Wi-Fi solution provider that allowed GCI to replicate and scale Wi-Fi solutions across a multitude of customers.

Early this year, GCI began evaluating wireless networking solution providers and was looking for a partner that could help critical customer needs and requirements going forward as well as provide strong Application Program Interfaces (API) (access to integrate with the Hub.

The Solution

After evaluating several other market leaders, GCI was introduced to Aerohive and its AdvantageMSP program that is offered to both Management-as-a-Service (MaaS) and Wireless-as-a-Service (WaaS) providers. With the rise of IT outsourcing and cloud networking, GCI needed to find a partner that enabled its own software development team to customize customer solutions within the network architecture.

"While the competitive base offerings were similar, what stood out with Aerohive was its understanding of the managed service provider world. Aerohive's solution goes beyond connectivity and allows GCI to support its customers in a carrier grade multi-tenant environment help reduce operational costs, and open up opportunities to increase service revenue," states John Barnhardt, VP of Business Product at GCI.

GCI has an extensive engineering and development team that works on customized solutions for many of its customers. The company is building the Hub, a one-stop portal for customers to have account visibility, create trouble tickets, as well as a view into operations and network activity. GCI needed to continue to offer the Hub, and integrate information from the wireless infrastructure into a single consistent portal. Maintaining the GCI experience through this single interface meant that any solution provider needed to provide APIs and other tools to easily pull information into the Hub in a way that provided real value to the customer.

Aerohive presented a solution optimized for technical and business processes, enabling GCI to offer value beyond connectivity. Through HiveManager NG, Aerohive allows GCI to manage multiple customers, access an open API platform to unlock additional value, and create a path to drive increased services revenue. GCI deployed Aerohive at several pilot customer locations with great results.

Results

GCI has started deploying Aerohive solutions to several customers, pairing a variety of services with managed Wi-Fi to meet customer demands and requirements. A leading healthcare provider located in the Alaska North Slope came to GCI for managed Wi-Fi and video teleconferencing (VTC) services, which in remote locations is a complex endeavor requiring dedicated satellite circuits and connectivity running all the way back to Anchorage. In remote locations like rural Alaska, many healthcare providers rely on video to interact via tablet devices with patients and providers as the primary point of care.

With HiveManager NG, GCI was able to put together a comprehensive solution , complete with cabling floor plans, number of required Aerohive access points and switches, and network design and layout, even before the customer had signed off on the contract. Having planning and design tools built into the network management system simplified deployment and made the process seamless for providing Wi-Fi as an essential utility.

"What sets Aerohive apart are the robust MSP benefits in HiveManager NG," explains Barnhardt. "Unlike other distributed control solution providers, Aerohive is agile and flexible and can offer the MSP business model GCI requires for our customers today, without us having to do a lot of work on our backend. We worked side by side with Aerohive developers and are thrilled to share a similar vision for what it takes to offer outsourced WLANs that will meet customer requirements today and into the future."

Similarly, a large law firm in Anchorage turned to GCI for managed Wi-Fi, and GCI was able to leverage Aerohive's open platform to customize the network for the firm's needs. GCI provides a robust enterprise WLAN with separate access for employees and guests, within a secure network environment. With security a top concern for many of its customers, GCI looks forward to setting up a co-managed MSP model to allow customers to make changes and have complete network visibility, while leaning on GCI to handle more advanced network features, configurations and support.

"GCI anticipates the partnership with Aerohive will deliver strong benefits to our business customers, including those in the education and healthcare sectors where high-density wireless performance and security are paramount requirements. Working with Aerohive will help create new market opportunities for us to offer expanded services to these verticals, as more organizations look to outsource Wi-Fi management and to free up employees to support their own business initiatives," states Barnhardt.

Meeting Changing Mobility Needs

Once customers deploy a solid network architecture from Aerohive, GCI has found a majority of customers see a tremendous value in migrating operations to the WLAN. Knowing the network is secure, fast and reliable, gives way for additional features to come onto the wireless network, opening up new revenue streams as customers begin to not only rely on Wi-Fi, but trust GCI to provide additional managed services and insights across the entire organization.

GCI is well positioned to leverage Aerohive's distributed architecture as it adapts and responds to emerging network requirements for its customers to meet growth and expansion goals.