Charmer Sunbelt Group

Reliable, Cost Effective, and Easy to Manage Wireless Networking for Warehousing Facilities with Cooperative Control Wireless LAN from Aerohive

Challenges

- CSG needed a WLAN to support its warehouse migration to a new, automated order processing system running on SAP's Warehouse Management application
- CSG was concerned its existing controller-based WLAN infrastructure would not be able to keep up with the company's future needs
- Existing WLAN meant CSG faced the problem of having to add expensive controllers to existing WLAN deployment in order to scale
- Lacked centralized management capability

Results

- CSG liked Aerohive's controller-less architecture because it promised to be more cost-effective, reliable and easier to manage than controller-based options
- Aerohive access points (HiveAPs) can be configured remotely using HiveManager, eliminating the time and expense for two people to visit the site
- CSG is managing the HiveAPs through the HiveManager, which provides monitoring capabilities through a single, easy-to-use console
- CSG likes Aerohive's wireless mesh capability, which establishes a wireless mesh connection between neighboring HiveAPs

One of the country's largest wine and spirits distributors, the Charmer Sunbelt Group selected Aerohive's Cooperative Control wireless LAN solution for its distribution centers based on reliability, manageability, and cost effectiveness.

New York-based Charmer Sunbelt Group (CSG) distributes wine and spirits to retail establishments in 15 states and the District of Columbia, employing over 5000 people and generating more than $4.5 billion in annual sales. Products are distributed through a network of 22 warehouses ranging in size from 45,000 to 550,000 square feet.

The company has been migrating its warehouses to a new, automated order processing system running on SAP's Warehouse Management application. Sales personnel enter customer orders from their laptops during the day. Orders are then "picked" by warehouse staff that night for delivery the next day using computers

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mounted on forklifts. Connectivity is provided to these devices via wireless local area networks (WLANs) deployed throughout the warehouse.

The Challenge

CSG has been relying on WLANs from Motorola/Symbol for a number of years. CSG's Network Department, was concerned, however, that the legacy WLAN infrastructure would not be able to keep up with the company's future needs. Larger warehouse locations would exceed the number of access points that one Motorola controller could support. This meant installing an expensive second controller, plus one more for resiliency due to the mission-critical nature of the order processing system. In addition, the Motorola product, at the time, lacked the required central management capability.

Looking for Something Different

CSG's Network Department set out to find an alternative to the legacy WLAN vendor. "We demoed Aruba, and also looked at Meru Networks, but they didn't bring anything to the table that Aruba and Motorola didn't already bring."

Then Barcoding Inc., CSG's longtime vendor for wireless installation services suggested Aerohive. "We were not aware of a solution

that didn't require a controller. It was one of the major factors for selecting Aerohive as our WLAN solution."

Cooperative Control Architecture from Aerohive

Aerohive's cooperative control access points (HiveAPs) require no network controllers or overlay networks. Instead, software in the HiveAPs enables them to self organize into groups called Hives. The result is enterprise-class network management and security without the cost, performance, and availability issues associated with controller deployments like Motorola, Aruba, or Meru. "If the wireless network isn't working, we're not shipping, which means we're not making money. The wireless network could not be any more mission critical. That's one of the reasons we like the controller-less Aerohive architecture because there's no single point of failure."

Cost Effective Deployment

Following a successful demo at the Connecticut warehouse, Aerohive was placed in production there and at sites in Massachusetts, Philadelphia, and Maryland. "When we install wireless we light up the whole building, so employees on the office side can also access the wireless network for email, Web surfing, and file-and-print applications. We probably have 2000 employees that use typical laptop applications."

In the process of deploying Aerohive, CSG discovered another benefit of Aerohive. When deploying wireless systems from the legacy WLAN provider in the past, CSG and Barcoding Inc. would jointly perform a site survey. A local cabling company would then pull cable to the locations where access points would be installed. And finally, CSG's Network Department and Barcoding Inc. would return to install and configure the access points. "With Aerohive we can have the cabling company simply hang and plug in the access points. We can configure them remotely using the HiveManager. Eliminating the time and travel for two people to go back out to the site saves us an average of $7000 to $8000 a location."

Aerohive also requires less hardware. "With the previous solution we needed to purchase access points, primary and back-up controllers, switches, and software licenses. With Aerohive we only have to purchase access points and a license. That could save me tens of thousands of dollars per site."

Meeting Expectations and Then Some

In the initial evaluation, Aerohive met and exceeded all the requirements that CSG had. Since then, Aerohive has lived up to expectations. "We've had zero problems."

A great success indicator recently surfaced from a warehouse staff member asking CSG's Network Engineer when the new solution would be deployed. It had already been installed and running for a month!

Managing the HiveAPs through the HiveManager has been straightforward, which provides monitoring capabilities through a single, easy-to-use console. "It does everything that I need it to do and then some."

Planning for the Future to Save Even More

CSG has four sites fully deployed with 35 HiveAPs in place. Future plans call for the deployment of another 75 HiveAPs.

One Aerohive feature that CSG's Network Department particularly liked was the wireless mesh capability. The feature can establish a wireless mesh connection between neighboring HiveAPs using the second radio in the HiveAP. This is typically used to reroute network traffic around failures in the wired network. However, CSG envisions another application. At the Jacksonville warehouse, for example, CSG had to run fiber to the far end of the building, mount a switch, and run copper to the access point. "That one access point cost us $4000. With Aerohive, we could have simply installed a HiveAP and saved $3200."

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