Savers

Largest Thrift Store Chain in North America Selects Wireless Retail Solution from Aerohive

Challenges

- Modernize wireless network operations across corporate and retail store locations in the US, Canada, and Australia
- Determine retail solution for greater mobile customer interaction
- Future-proof Wi-Fi network as technology and customer requirements evolve
- Identify cost-effective cloud Wi-Fi solution with ease-of-installation and intuitive network management

Results

- Comprehensive and robust enterprise Wi-Fi solution rolled out across headquarters, retail locations and transportation and warehouse operations
- Access points with integrated Bluetooth will enable retail leader to provide greater customer services and leverage store insight and analytics
- Network system management with HiveManager NG is accessed remotely from the cloud with valuable built-in RF planning tools
- Retail features and analytics from Aerohive cater directly to a retail environment with deep understanding of customer insights and requirements

About Savers

Savers is the largest for-profit thrift store chain in North America and is a global organization. The company operates more than 300 retail locations under the store names Savers, Value Village, Village des Valeurs in Canada, and Savers Australia. Savers was founded in 1954, and partners with more than 150 charities to collect, deliver and resell donated items, paying these non-profit organizations for all collected goods. Aside from its retail success, Savers also contributes to a greater social and environmental impact as one of the largest used textile recyclers in the world improving lives through the power of reuse, creating another life and use for items and keeping millions of pounds of stuff out of landfills.

The Challenge

Part of what makes Savers so effective is the company's ability to empower non-profit partners and retail outlets to be successful. Savers helps non-profits and local charities to do what they do best by reaching out to their supporters to collect donations, while relying on Savers to supply the retail front end.

The company has expanded and modernized tremendously in the last decade. Savers added a call center located in El Paso, Texas to offer outsourced services to smaller charity organizations that did not have infrastructure in place to schedule operations like donation pick-ups and trucking operations.

> "We are in the beginning phases of leveraging wireless retail operations and the ways Aerohive's solution can open doorways on the business side of the house. We have confidence Aerohive's retail features and access points with integrated Bluetooth will help propel our business to the next level and stay ahead of what our customers want. Understanding fully what Wi-Fi means to our customers, and how we can best serve them in the near future, will enable us to make shopping at Savers the best it can be."

—Charles Blair
IT Infrastructure Manager
Savers

The headquarters office located near Seattle in Bellevue, Washington also recently expanded with greater office space in nearby Renton. The company manages more than 10 regional distribution centers and warehouses to support its growing retail stores.

With all this growth, the company realized it needed to upgrade and modernize its network infrastructure, as well as enable mobility and mobile operations in its stores. The IT team recognized that wireless capabilities would bring flexibility and mobility which were crucial for augmenting internal operations. It was also key to allow visiting employees and corporate staff to connect to the corporate network from any retail location.

The IT team was dealing with a burdened break-fix model of support and wanted to minimize these time-consuming problems that arose from the previous wireless network at the corporate offices. The company had not yet expanded Wi-Fi to its retail stores, and modernizing its network infrastructure was a significant priority for Savers going forward.

The Solution

With the need to upgrade the existing Wi-Fi solution at headquarters and call center offices, Savers began to evaluate numerous solution providers to identify the ideal solution to roll out across the entire company. The IT team needed to move away from reliance on the WAN, and move toward upgrading to a Wi-Fi solution that would also ensure continuous store operations. As a company that thrives on thrift, it's not surprising that cost was also a key directive for an enterprise solution.

While the Savers IT team is comprised of more than 60 staff, the network team has four employees, making an intuitive and feature-rich solution essential. Savers chose Aerohive as the wireless network standard across all retail stores and corporate operations. Savers worked with Aerohive reseller Datec, an enterprise infrastructure provider, system integrator, and wireless communications solutions provider based in the Pacific Northwest.

"Aerohive demonstrated that the network solution they were offering was more innovative for a retail environment," explains Charles Blair, IT Infrastructure Manager at Savers. "We recognized Aerohive had developed solutions specifically for retail, with customized features allowing the potential for greater customer interaction, which gave us confidence that Aerohive would enable Savers to stay ahead of the curve and future-proof our wireless solution for years to come."

Savers deployed Aerohive AP130 access points in retail stores and trucking operations, and chose AP250 access points for corporate offices and locations. Savers is using HiveManager NG for network management, and using Aerohive APs as a RADIUS server for secure device authentication for a guest network. Even with junior network administrators, Savers has found HiveManager to be intuitive and with the built-in RF planning and mapping tools, configuration and deployment were seamless and went forward with no glitches at the time of installation. Corporate offices are set up with two separate SSIDs with VLANs on the backend to segment corporate and BYOD devices. At retail locations, the network is set up with one SSID for operations and production devices, and another for corporate users, creating a mirrored corporate experience for visiting employees.

Results

Savers has an atypical business model from a traditional retail outlet. Unlike other retail stores with static inventory, each Savers store receives and sells unique product, which must be sorted, graded and processed on site. The company has developed proprietary software to track inventory and manage donations by type, size, grade and charitable source.

All donations are received, sorted and processed in the backroom of retail locations. Since deploying Aerohive, these operations are now mobile and operate over the wireless network, greatly impacting productivity and efficiency. Employees now have complete freedom to design the backroom workstation for optimal workflow. Savers associates use wireless cards to run devices like barcode printers and scanners. Previously, the workstations were cabled, and if staff wanted to change the setup of a workstation, that often would require moving Ethernet cabling, bringing in a lift, and incurring cost.

"There is always someone who has the ability to build a better mousetrap," states Blair. "Now Savers team members in our retail locations have the flexibility to brainstorm ways for increased productivity, and can move workstation configurations without additional cost."

Down the road, Savers will deploy Aerohive access points in retail locations with integrated Bluetooth capabilities. This was a huge selling point for the retailer as Bluetooth technology will allow Savers to connect with customers, including unauthenticated users, to allow customer interaction, offer promotional opportunities and enable push notifications. Location tracking is also optimal with Bluetooth, giving valuable insight into store layout and design. Savers will also look at eventually moving POS terminals and front end transaction operations onto the wireless network.

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Corporate operations have also been transformed with enterprise Wi-Fi. A guest network is available at headquarters offices for visiting vendors and contractors. The Aerohive solution is a big step up for guests, who had to previously connect to a network with a password written on a piece of paper. Wi-Fi connection is now modernized and automated in a few simple steps.

Thrift is Big Business

As Savers continues to roll out new stores, Aerohive is the standard retail wireless solution moving forward. The IT team has streamlined deployment, making Aerohive installation a seamless experience for staff at sites, and saving cost and man hours for rolling out new locations. As Savers looks ahead to leverage wireless retail features from Aerohive, the company is well positioned to better understand and serve its customers. That's a bargain we can get behind.