

Servium



CASE STUDY

Sofology kicks back with a comfy new wireless network

For Sofology, technology is quite literally in front of the customer. An integral part of the customer in-store experience, wireless network connectivity is critical. However, as an original early adopter, the wireless technology being used was dated, disparate and poorly performing. With ambitious growth plans and ideas for further innovation on the horizon, the IT team did not want the wireless network to hold the business back.



The customer

Sofology is the UK's largest sofa specialist and part of DFS Furniture Plc. They have an enviable 40 year heritage in furniture retail, employing around 1000 people and generating revenues in excess of £140m. Sofology is a trailblazer and has long recognised the value technology can play in helping to craft a memorable and effective in-store experience. They were among the first retailers to make use of the Apple iPad as a point of sale device for taking orders in-store, made possible by the development of a bespoke application. With aggressive expansion plans just around the corner, technology will continue to play a vital role in the future of the business.



Considerations

- Outdated wireless network needed refresh
- Mixed technology deployed across stores
- No network-wide visibility
- Need to future-proof the network
- Easy deployment to support new store rollout

The challenge

Sofology's in-store personnel are trained to offer great advice and rely on their custom application and mobile devices to support the customer experience.

With the ability to show off 250,000 variations of product, this technology

is an important part of the customer journey. To make this possible, in-store Wi-Fi is critical.

The reliance on Wi-Fi, however, had emerged so quickly within Sofology that there had been little time to settle on preferred standards or solution.

Several years on, the result was a mixed wireless network estate that was outdated, hard to manage, and no longer offering in-store personnel the performance or coverage they needed.

Already with 40 stores across the UK and bold plans to continue expansion, Sofology recognised that they needed to refresh this part of their network.

“Managing our wireless networks was really difficult. The mixed bag of solutions in place meant we had poor visibility over what we had and how it was functioning. We wanted to standardise on a common solution across all our stores that would live up to the demands of today but also offer us a platform to build on into the future. Importantly, we wanted something that would be quick and simple to deploy in-store,” explains Gavin Nickerson, Head of IT at Sofology.

Similarly, Sofology was acutely aware that much of the existing wireless network deployed was operating on legacy security standards, so represented a vulnerability that needed addressing.

“We also wanted to keep innovating with in-store technology. We have plans to use additional devices and introduce more sophisticated services and knew if we didn't do something with the wireless network this would ultimately hold us back,” continues Nickerson.

The solution

Sofology turned to long-time solutions partner Servium for guidance and help assessing the market for solutions.

“When we first saw a demo of Cisco Meraki, we were really impressed and quickly realised that it could do much of what we were looking for,” explains Nickerson.

With the help of Servium, the team continued to review competitive wireless offerings to meet their technological and business requirements, but Sofology discovered that Cisco Meraki offered much greater deployment flexibility with a more intuitive management interface.



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understand store hotspots was really exciting,” says Nickerson.

“It was important to take the time to deliberate between products and find one that would fit our business and that met our performance requirements. With Servium’s help we found that Cisco Meraki could give our company what it needs to meet our overall objectives.”

Cisco Meraki can be managed from anywhere through an elegant browser-based management dashboard. It gives visibility into the network users, their devices, and their applications. Armed with rich analytics, administrators can quickly create access control and application usage policies, optimising both the end-user experience and network security.

As a result, wireless networks can easily be operated and secured, and new networks deployed in a fraction of the time. Through the dashboard, zero-touch cloud provisioning means access points can also be configured remotely.

Sofology realised this could greatly help with new store rollouts as access points could be configured offsite and then easily installed on-premise - even by non-IT personnel.

Sofology also believed that the powerful transmitters inside the enterprise-class 802.11ac Cisco Meraki access points would ensure stores received much better Wi-Fi coverage. Likewise, in-built security features that scan for and protect against security threats would enable

them to deploy more secure guest access for customers coming into the store.

“We loved the functionality of the Cisco Meraki solution. It seemed so much more than a wireless LAN - the ability to streamline guest access, see our whole network through one pane of glass, and in time start to use novel features like location analytics to help us improve customer engagement and better

Highlights

- Cloud-managed wireless networking from Cisco Meraki
- Zero-touch network provisioning
- Modern network and security standards
- Rich functionality to improve in-store experience for staff and customers



Outcomes

- Complete visibility of network performance
- Faster network deployment for new stores
- Unified solution for entire network
- Greater control over who's connecting and how the network is used

“There have also been noticeable performance improvements in-store. It's always nice to hear staff commenting favourably, but when the reports are of apps running faster and technology positively contributing to staff performance, I feel we've done a good job.”

Beyond the technical advantages of the solution, Servium was also able to help Sofology secure a 3-year 0% finance deal on the technology, helping them to make budgets go further and support other projects planned.

The result

The solution has been implemented across the entire store network. Since the solution went live, Sofology has for the first time been able to see a complete view of the performance and operational health of their wireless network.

What's more, the speed of setting up new networks has been dramatically reduced.

“Before it would take several days to set up a new store network. Beyond a few minutes' configuration on our dashboard, now it's so easy to ship all the access points needed to store and have other personnel on-site install the devices and switch them on.”

“They automatically join our network and they appear on the dashboard instantly. Once operational we can then see and control all the devices we have connecting and how they interact with our network. We can even throttle bandwidth or block certain applications,” comments Nickerson.

“In no time at all, Servium got to grips with the demands of the project, came up with a shortlist of potential solutions and got us in front of the technology. Their knowledge and insight helped us arrive at the Cisco Meraki solution and then see that it worked for us both functionally and commercially.”

Gavin Nickerson, Head of IT at Sofology

