

First Ark Group

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Although First Ark had an old wireless network in place, it was not meeting the growing demands for increased connectivity throughout the business.

“Giving visitors internet access at the office was incredibly difficult and time consuming. Access is controlled via a proxy server so our IT staff had to manually log- on visitors’ laptops to change configuration settings when Internet access was required. Apple’s iOS doesn’t fully support proxy authentication so Board Members using iPads struggled to log on in the office at all,”

David McMahon, Technical Support Manager at First Ark

First Ark needed to replace the existing infrastructure and wanted a solution which would provide them with reliable wireless network connectivity in their offices whilst securely allowing visitors to access the internet. Internet access for staff was also an issue – 3G signal in the office is poor so many staff couldn’t use their own devices.

They opted for a Cisco Meraki wireless network, designed and installed by MLR Networks, a Cheshire-based Cisco Premier Partner.



CUSTOMER:

First Ark Group

OVERVIEW:

First Ark is a group of companies which includes Knowsley Housing Trust, Vivark and One Ark, delivering quality homes and services in Knowsley. The group has two main office locations on Merseyside.

SOLUTIONS:



- Wireless
- Foresight
- MLR Networks' Support

HARDWARE & SUPPORT:



Cisco Meraki cloud-managed wireless network from MLR Networks.

Hardware and software:

- Cisco Meraki MR16 Access Points
- Cisco Meraki MX60 Security Appliance
- Z1 Teleworker devices
- Cisco Meraki Management Dashboard
- Cisco Meraki Systems Manager (MDM) tool



"We were hugely impressed with the usability and features of the management module during the trial; onboarding the devices was pretty quick; we could set up each device and push out configurations easily. The devices are secure; if they are lost or stolen, we can track their location with Google maps and remote wipe the devices to remove any sensitive information,"
David McMahon, Technical Support Manager at First Ark

CISCO MERAKI MANAGEMENT DASHBOARD

Having worked with MLR Networks in the past, David McMahon knew that he could rely on their expertise in networking to deliver a high performance wireless network solution. Initially, First Ark trialled the Cisco Meraki Management Dashboard, by installing the Systems Manager tool to monitor and manage 70 company-owned Android devices, used by staff when visiting tenants.

SIMPLE, SECURE AND ROBUST WIRELESS NETWORK

Following on from the successful trial, First Ark decided to replace their existing wireless network with a Cisco Meraki cloud-managed network designed and installed by MLR Networks.

"The installation was to take place during normal working hours, so we knew we had to keep disruption to a minimum. Pre-installation configuration of the new access points took place off-site at our office in Widnes, Cheshire. The new hardware was installed during normal office hours and was completed in two days. Both offices were up and running within a week,"

Ian Morris, Managing Director, MLR Networks.

As a result, First Ark has excellent network coverage throughout both buildings; there are no more black spots in the office space or conference rooms. More importantly, First Ark has a network which supports corporate activities, allows guests to log on quickly and securely and offers BYOD access to staff, easily managed from the web-based management dashboard.

"Onboarding of guests is now slick and professional. When a guest tries to use the network, they are directed to a First Ark splash screen which collects their registration details. An alert is sent to the IT department so we can approve the access quickly. The whole process is seamless, if the guest returns at a later date, their log in details are remembered and we can easily activate their account,"

David McMahon, Technical Support Manager at First Ark

WIRELESS INSTALLATION

From the management module, Layer 7 traffic shaping provides application level bandwidth-control, prioritising bandwidth for critical applications whilst restricting video content from sites such as You Tube and BitTorrent. Since the wireless installation, First Ark has added two new locations to the corporate network by creating site-to-site VPNs using Cisco Meraki MX security devices.

WHAT THEY HAVE NOW

- Corporate network: secure high-speed network access throughout First Ark's offices
- Guest network: allows visitors quick and easy access to the internet
- BYOD network: allows staff to connect their personal devices
- Mobile network: connects field workers and maintenance staff using company-owned Android tablets
- Foresight Remote Monitoring: an always-on tool which gives First Ark a 'single pane of glass' to monitor all the Cisco Meraki devices, the status of network, the Cisco switched infrastructure and remote sites

FUTURE-PROOF NETWORKING

Now First Ark has an infrastructure which will last for years, and support many future projects. The signal strength within the offices is now voice grade, supporting an upgrade to VOIP/IP Telephony.

What's more, First Ark plans to use Cisco Meraki technology in both new build and existing offices as well as piloting a scheme to offer Wi-Fi at an extra care sheltered accommodation scheme, aligning with the Government's Digital Inclusion Strategy and giving tenants access to online government services. Layer 7 traffic shaping can restrict content, protecting tenants, their children and visitors who may use the Internet.