



Based in Phoenix, Arizona, Make-A-Wish® is a nonprofit with a powerful mission to grant the wish of every child diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition. Whether it's becoming a pilot, going bug hunting, or beautifying the neighborhood, Make-A-Wish and its 27,000 volunteers work to make every wish come true.

With a wish being granted, on average, every 35 minutes, Make-A-Wish does not have the bandwidth to deal with an unreliable network. To enable employees to spend as much time as possible granting wishes, Make-A-Wish turns to Meraki cloud managed access points, switches, security appliances, and mobility management for a reliable, comprehensive, and empowering IT solution.

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*-Jeff Pick, Director of Technology*

Jeff Pick, Director of Technology for Make-A-Wish America, works at the National Office in Phoenix to support the 62 local Make-A-Wish chapters around the country. When he began working at Make-A-Wish, each chapter had its own networking gear, and there was no way to troubleshoot or easily communicate between chapters. Alongside the management challenges that accompanied this agglomeration of patchwork equipment, leadership was also calling for an increase in security and governance across the organization. With approximately 110 physical locations and a lean team of engineers, Jeff knew he needed a secure, easy-to-use, centralized management platform to efficiently support each location and meet the Board's requirements.

Enter Meraki. After evaluating many competing networking solutions, Make-A-Wish chose to go with a full Meraki setup at every location. “Meraki was cost-effective with a good feature set. We did a trial, and it was so easy to configure, and could notify us if anything was going wrong on the network,” he said. At every Make-A-Wish chapter, you will soon be able to find a Meraki MX Security Appliance, MS Switch, and a number of MR Access Points as Jeff and his team continue rolling each location over to Meraki.

Each individual MX securely connects to other branch MXs in the Make-A-Wish network, and then back to a master MX400 at headquarters via Meraki Auto VPN. Meraki's unique auto provisioning site-to-site VPN connects chapters securely, without tedious manual VPN configuration. For this reason, Auto VPN is one of the Make-A-Wish IT team's favorite Meraki features, as it makes creating these site-to-site tunnels extremely simple, done in seconds with just a few clicks. With these connections, Make-A-Wish is able to share internal resources securely within their organization. These security appliances also include Meraki's Layer 7 firewall, intrusion prevention, failover and HA, and content filtering, making them extremely powerful and feature-packed devices.

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Connected to every MX is an intelligent MS Switch. In addition to the remote troubleshooting, port-level visibility, and ease of use these backbone switches provide, the topology feature built into MS Switches also offer the Make-A-Wish team with a detailed network map at any time.



Hooked up to the switches are 802.11ac MR Access Points. “Meraki APs have fixed 99% of the wireless errors we were having before.”

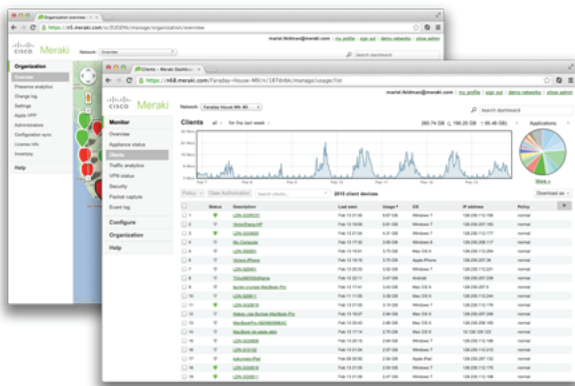
Taking advantage of the flexibility of Meraki, Jeff and the team have set up four SSIDs on the wireless network that are available in every location. The most secure SSID is for employees using foundation-owned devices and requires two-factor authentication. Encrypted on both ends, Jeff and the team can be sure no sensitive data related to wish beneficiaries or donors leaves their network. A second SSID is not broadcast but is provided for visiting guests and volunteers, and grants selective access to local printers and remote desktops. A third SSID is publicly broadcast and guests can check-in using Facebook login and a shared password. “We're now able to get greater social media visibility, as well as provide decent WiFi to our visitors,” explained Jeff. “Custom splash pages are coming soon!”

The last custom SSID connects employee-owned devices that are enrolled in Make-A-Wish's Systems Manager network. Systems Manager is the Meraki solution for mobility management, and allows for a wide range of control and visibility over mobile devices including tracking assets, pushing security settings, and installing software. When employees install the Systems Manager client on their devices, Systems Manager automatically pushes the necessary WiFi credentials for the appropriate Make-A-Wish SSID to the devices. “We'll soon also be pushing apps via Systems Manager, such as Office 365 and Skype for business,” said Jeff. He and his team are able to track and control all devices connecting to the Make-A-Wish network, providing several layers of security and visibility that did not exist before making the transition to Meraki.

With more and more chapters rolling over to a complete Meraki setup, the team has been pleased with the easy plug-and-play nature of Meraki hardware. All Meraki hardware can be pre-configured from the cloud dashboard, shipped to a remote location, and once plugged in, automatically download all settings. This simplifies deploying hardware to dozens of distant sites, as do templates in the Meraki dashboard that allow the cloning of existing settings to new networks. If necessary, tweaking settings and applying custom policies can be done at any time from any device that has access to the Meraki dashboard.

The granular control and deep insight afforded by Meraki make monitoring and adjusting network settings easy and empowering. “We ran into a situation with a local IT vendor that one of our chapters had previously been paying to help manage the network and servers locally at the chapter who didn’t provide us with any passwords or other important information when we converted the chapter over to Meraki. We plugged in the Meraki hardware, started sniffing around, and we were able to discover what was going on and replace the current setup without their help, and with very limited downtime for the chapter. This experience turned one of our senior engineers, originally a skeptic, into a true Meraki believer,” shared Jeff.

“We’ve also seen great cost savings with Meraki, from the initial hardware purchase to the time and labor savings that we continue to experience,” he said. When new interns started, the team noticed a few network slowdowns. Drilling into the affected networks from their Meraki dashboard, the IT team soon noticed a music streaming app taking up a disproportionate amount of bandwidth, and were able to create rules on the network level to limit bandwidth for that specific application in just a few minutes.



The team has also been able to remotely troubleshoot using alerts and live tools. These pings, cable tests, and packet captures combined with the granular visibility into each network has allowed Make-A-Wish to report ISP issues and address power outages as soon as they occur, saving time and money for the organization. “A chapter might not think to call in and tell us there’s a thunderstorm happening, but we want to know when a storm causes the power to go out and the network to go down. With Meraki, now we know,” shared Jeff.

As Make-A-Wish America continues to roll out Meraki to all of their chapters, they know they can depend on the reliability, flexibility, and future-proof nature of their cloud managed IT.

