Guest WiFi at Noodles & Company Provides Superior Engagement

Highlights

- Noodles & Company is a chain of nearly 500 fast casual restaurants across the U.S. specializing in healthy, fresh and flavorful food from around the world served conveniently fast.

- Reliable guest WiFi combined with thorough and automated wireless monitoring & security for PCI compliance were the incumbent needs.

- By integrating guest WiFi with the opportunity to sign up for their loyalty program, the company more than doubled the number of people opting in to their loyalty program.

- The solution had to simplify centralized management of distributed locations and provide flexibility to expand guest WiFi access to more locations or to support more applications in the future in a cost-effective manner.

- The company deployed Arista Cognitive WiFi that combined the power of guest WiFi with top-rated WIPS and PCI compliance scanning and reporting for a powerful cloud WiFi solution.

Arista's Cognitive WiFi™ brings dramatic cost-savings, guest engagement, and reduction in IT support load at Noodles & Company. For two decades, Noodles & Company has been catering to its hungry customers with flavors from around the world – made quickly, yet served fresh and with style. Its classic dishes tailored for every palate include a variety of noodles and pasta – from Penne Rosa and Japanese Pan Noodles to Wisconsin Mac & Cheese, and an array of soups, sandwiches and salads too. Driven by the goal to provide its customers with a relaxing and pleasurable dining experience, Noodles & Company wanted to offer complimentary guest WiFi access in its restaurants.

"I am a fan of any situation where I don't need to negotiate with a vendor over and over again. Our process with Arista was very straightforward and quick. We did not have to negotiate and I was extremely happy with the features and functionality of Arista's guest WiFi and security at that price point. It was a win-win situation."

"We looked at a bunch of solutions. I was blown away by the price point, features and functionality we were going to get with Arista cloud-managed WiFi. Other wireless solutions didn't have all the functionality; they did a part of what we were going to address with Arista, but at a higher cost."

– Corey Kline, Director of IT, Noodles & Company

The Challenge

When searching for a cost-effective and easy-to-manage guest WiFi solution Noodles & Company initially deployed a managed WiFi service from another vendor, but given the cost associated with that solution, company-wide deployment of guest WiFi was not feasible. Even after paying a high price, the solution didn't offer the wireless monitoring and protection to comply with the wireless security requirements of the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS). That's when Corey Kline, IT Director of Noodles & Company, started looking for an alternative solution in 2012. "Given the small size of the team providing tier-1 IT support to almost 300 restaurants, which has now expanded to nearly 500 restaurants, the WiFi solution had to be very stable and not generate unnecessary support calls," Kilne said.

Strong security and PCI compliance was also a top priority. "Previously we were relying on some compensating controls to comply with the PCI wireless security requirements," he added. "But given the high standards of diligence and security we set ourselves internally, we wanted to do a thorough job with PCI compliance across all our locations. So having a strong wireless intrusion detection and prevention functionality built into the WiFi solution was imperative." Corey's team looked at various enterprise WiFi solutions before choosing Arista. "We looked at a bunch of solutions. I was blown away by the price point, features and functionality we were going to get with Arista," he said. "Other solutions didn't have all the functionalities; they did a part of what we were going to address with Arista, but at a higher cost."

The Solution

Noodles & Company deployed Arista Cognitive WiFi – a cloud managed platform providing WiFi access, WIPS protection, and PCI compliance reporting. Opting for a full opex payment model with a monthly subscription paid annually, Noodles & Company was able to significantly lower the total cost of ownership and did not have to make any upfront investment for purchasing the hardware.

Implemented as an 'intelligent edge' cloud architecture, the Arista Cognitive WiFi eliminated Noodles & Company's cost and complexity when compare to the traditional controller-based architecture. Arista APs provide high-speed guest WiFi access, while constantly monitoring for presence of unauthorized WiFi devices and protecting the network from wireless threats such as rogue access points, thus fulfilling the PCI DSS wireless security requirements. This enabled Noodles & Company to provide engaging guest WiFi access in its restaurants without ever compromising security. Arista APs also have a full-featured firewall built in that allows segmentation and isolation of guest WiFi traffic from private internal networks that are part of the cardholder data environment (CDE), further simplifying PCI compliance. Integrated traffic shaping and QoS provide granular control on applications and bandwidth usage per SSID.

Noodles & Company works to provide a personalized experience for every guest who walks through the door, from food selections to guest engagement. One of the most important ways they do this is through their EClub, the Noodles & Company loyalty program. It's an opportunity for two-way communication: the company can share interesting things happening at each restaurant, and guests can share feedback, for continued personalization.

Kline found that guest WiFi was an important business benefit, and contributed to these personalized experiences. "Once we modified the guest WiFi sign-in to include the

opportunity to sign up for our EClub, we saw two important things happen. First, 12% of the people who sign in to our WiFi also choose to sign up for our EClub, and that represents a 100% increase in the number of signups. And when a guest signs in to our WiFi and opts in to our EClub, Arista helped us to automatically integrate those guests into a database for communicating with our loyalty program members. This means we can continue using the Arista Cognitive WiFi to improve guest engagement, and make it an even more personal experience for our guests. Because ultimately, that's what they love about Noodles & Company."

Easy to deploy and manage

Arista Cognitive WiFi is managed from the cloud, which enables a true plug-and-play deployment and seamless configuration. Arista APs can be powered over the IEEE 802.3af Power over Ethernet (PoE) standard. Once they're unpacked and have Internet access, Arista APs automatically discover and securely connect to CloudVision® over an AES-encrypted tunnel. As soon as they connect to the cloud server, they become visible as icons on the Web-based management console. A unique feature that makes the Arista solution ideal for distributed enterprises like Noodles & Company with hundreds or even thousands of geographically distributed locations is Location Navigator, its location-based management architecture. IT administrators can map the entire deployment visually in a hierarchical manner and push SSID configurations, radio properties, WIPS settings, and more across all sites through automated policy propagation.

"It's just so easy!" exclaimed Corey Kline. "We spent less than half a day configuring the system. As soon as a new Arista device was plugged in at any of our locations, it showed up on the management console. All we had to do is drag and drop the device icon into the appropriate location folder. And, in a matter of minutes, the device had downloaded the configuration – enabling both the WiFi network and WIPS protection." The ability to define multiple configuration templates and apply a particular template to one or more locations from the central management console presented Kline and his team with much-needed flexibility.

Noodles & Company is now fully deployed with secure cloud managed WiFi. They have rolled out Arista devices across all restaurant locations to provide guest WiFi access. The Arista devices also act as a WIPS sensor, monitoring and defending the wireless airspace 24/7. The Noodles & Company IT team can apply a different configuration template to change the policies and settings of WiFi at selected restaurants in a matter of minutes, if needed. This gives multi-site businesses like Noodles & Company the flexibility to securely expand more cloud managed WiFi networks (SSIDs) on existing Arista APs to support new applications in the future.

Kline explained, "The flexibility to securely expand the WiFi presence in restaurants was a requirement. While today our focus is on providing guest WiFi access in the restaurants, in the future, we might consider running other applications such as mobile PoS terminals over a secure corporate WiFi network. If that need arises, I wanted us to be in a position where we can say 'Yes!'"

Based on the success of the first phase of the deployment of Arista Cognitive WiFi, Noodles & Company has rolled out Arista's solution across all of its restaurants as well as in its corporate headquarters. All locations are centrally managed from Arista CloudVision.