

Why Wi-Fi will become the next corporate must-have



By [Shane Chorley](#)

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It's clear that businesses are going to become increasingly dependent on Wi-Fi in the future but it's important that there be a clear strategy in place.

Wi-Fi is not new. Although it's hard to track its origins, it's safe to say Wi-Fi was being used on a large scale for the first time in the late 1990s - which probably qualifies it as being prehistoric in tech terms. But there has been renewed interest in the technology of late, and with good reason.

For one, analysts have predicted that in the next few years, the average person will go from owning two to three Wi-Fi enabled devices (such as a laptop, tablet and smart phone) to seven, or more, if the futurists are correct in assuming that we'll soon download our emails via our fridges, bedside radios and televisions.

Secondly, we've seen a distinct preference for connecting via Wi-Fi as opposed to 3G mobile broadband. Approximately 90% of all tablets sold in the USA last year were Wi-Fi only devices, with industry analysts placing the blame on outdated data packages and consumers' reluctance to enter into long-term service plans with specific providers. And considering the fact that most new laptops entering the market are condensed devices (without Ethernet ports), the need for Wi-Fi is undisputed.

But it's important to emphasise that not all Wi-Fi networks are created equal, nor is Wi-Fi limited to the coffee shop hotspots we're most familiar with. And if our customers, guests and employees are going to require Wi-Fi, we have to consider how we can enable that safely, securely and conveniently.

Offloading

When YouTube - and smart phones - started growing in popularity, telecommunications companies quickly realised that video was consuming close to 80% of their networks. Deploying cellular networks to cover the demand would of course be extremely expensive, especially as data has traditionally been a low contributor to revenue. We've seen many of these firms compensate by rolling out high-speed Wi-Fi services in specific areas, and then bundling automated switches with cellular contracts so that users are effectively 'offloaded' onto different networks depending on which area they enter, or interconnected to a different provider (who is then charged a connection fee). The end result is that users enjoy the ease of connection, and the telecommunications firm is able to avoid costly network upgrades. That also has implications for businesses, which have to ensure that they own the right air space to meet their customers' needs.

Large Public Venue (LPV) Wi-Fi

We also expect to see Large Public Venues such as conference venues, universities, malls and even sports stadium adopt Wi-Fi. This has already made a significant impact in countries like India, where cricket fans use betting apps that allow them to place bets per ball.

Stadiums partner with app makers and networks to use Wi-Fi as both a revenue generator and a means of filling the stadium, game after game.

Sports fans are able to place bets, take photos, or even order hot dogs to be delivered to their seats, making the entire experience more enjoyable. In South Africa, where we often see empty seats, this could soon become a significant draw card.

Corporate managed Wi-Fi

Most of us are familiar with off-the-shelf Wi-Fi routers that are typically used in our homes. Trying to use the same router in an office environment, on the other hand, will not have the same results.

These routers can't support more than 5 to 15 users at a time before it fails, and are subject to interference from basic equipment - even microwaves. Corporate managed Wi-Fi allows businesses to roll out Wi-Fi access points that secures the network and empowers your company firewall to become the WLAN controller. It meets all of the requirements of security, auto-provisioning, standardisation and compliance a corporate customer demands - and gives the company control over employees' and guest users' activity over their Wi-Fi connection through a single, cohesive and manageable system.

This makes it ideal for businesses that want to implement a Bring-Your-Own-Device (BYOD) policy. Perhaps best of all is the seamless on-boarding feature - employees can connect safely and securely in different parts of their office park without undergoing a lengthy registration process every single time.

Conclusion

It's clear that businesses are going to become increasingly dependent on Wi-Fi in the future and if there isn't a clear strategy in place, they can find themselves vulnerable in terms of security breaches and downtime. Make sure that your company is fully prepared for the wireless world by speaking to your provider and ensuring that you have a best-of-breed solution in place.

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