

CABELA'S OUTFITS ITS MISSION-CRITICAL WIRELESS LAN TO CURB COSTS AND MANAGE PCI COMPLIANCE



Cabela's is a leading specialty retailer, and the world's largest direct marketer of hunting, fishing, camping and related outdoor merchandise. Since its founding in 1961, the company has grown to become one of the most well-known outdoor recreation brands in the world. Cabela's offers a wide and distinctive selection of high-quality outdoor products through an established direct business and 30 destination retail stores.

"Our wireless numbers seem to grow daily," said Gary Putnam, enterprise network manager at Cabela's. "We support office buildings, distribution centers and retail stores running wireless phones, scan guns, laptops, printers, PCs and a few other technologies. It is imperative that our users have reliable access through the wireless infrastructure so that they can run the applications that service our customers and keep the business moving."

MANAGING A MOVING TARGET

Putnam's job is not easy. "Wireless is always a moving target," he said. Like many retailers, Cabela's runs separate networks, with separate security requirements, for wireless phones, RF guns, wireless printers and laptops. "With these separate environments and new PCI compliance issues, encryption, key changes, and more, managing our wireless network had become a daunting task," said Putnam.

Cabela's had recently upgraded to a Cisco controller-based architecture — 4400 series controllers and 1130, 1230, and 1240 series APs — to reduce network complexity. However, the company knew that it needed better operational management capabilities to meet its business goals: curbing costs while delivering reliable service to business stakeholders and meeting compliance requirements.

MAKING THE CASE FOR AIRWAVE: BETTER VISIBILITY WITH SUBSTANTIAL COST SAVINGS

Cabela's evaluated the AirWave Wireless Management Suite™ from Aruba Networks in early 2009. "We were impressed by the level of visibility that we saw in AirWave. We liked being able to drill down from a summary screen to see all of the supporting details. Also, we found AirWave's location information to be more accurate than our previous solutions," said Matt Perry, an engineer in the enterprise network group. In addition, Cabela's IT organization was looking to make the most of its maintenance budgets and valuable data center space. Deploying AirWave allowed the company to consolidate two network management appliances down to one, generating cost savings of approximately 70 percent.

NETWORK SIZE:

- 2,000 APs spread across corporate office buildings, distribution centers, and retail stores
- 2,500 wireless devices connected to the network at any given time
- More than 800 switches and routers

INFRASTRUCTURE MIXTURE:

- Cisco 1130, 1230, and 1240 series APs with 4400 series controllers

ARUBA PRODUCTS:

- AirWave Wireless Network Management Suite
- AirWave RAPIDS Rogue Detection
- AirWave VisualRF Location and Mapping

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Gary Putnam

Enterprise Network Manager
Cabela's

The implementation was straightforward. "The fact that AirWave can auto-discover APs and clients and bring in CDP neighbor information made the job a lot faster," Perry said. "We found it efficient to use AirWave's folders and groups to organize our network so that we could find things by site, device type, etc. This structure made it much easier for us to set up the alerts we wanted and to add in new equipment as it was deployed." Putnam noted the responsiveness of the AirWave team during the early days of the implementation. "AirWave has been attentive to our needs," Putman said. "We appreciate the access we get to the people who are building the product. They listen to our needs and are ready to take on our feature requests."

FASTER TROUBLESHOOTING

Cabela's Enterprise Network Group found that it can troubleshoot user problems much more quickly with AirWave. "The interface is very intuitive," Putman said. "We can search for a client and get to the information we need without having to look through 20 different screens. We can understand what's going on in our network visually rather than having to dig into the guts of our equipment. All of the information we get — including client connection history — has sped up the troubleshooting process for my team." The team has found that AirWave's ability to integrate with their WLSE, ACS, and RADIUS servers speeds up troubleshooting even further.

VisualRF™, the location and mapping feature of Airwave, has also contributed to faster troubleshooting at Cabela's. "VisualRF has helped us with both device placement and troubleshooting," Perry said. "It provides a clear view of coverage holes, and it's intelligent enough to see bleed-through between floors." Cabela's has used VisualRF to locate lost equipment, amounting to thousands of dollars in savings.

In one case, an employee inadvertently placed an RF gun on a shelf in one of Cabela's large distribution centers. Putman's team was able to narrow the search for the gun to a 10-foot area, which allowed warehouse staff to find the gun in minutes rather than months. In other instances, employees have walked out of a store with RF guns or wireless IP phone attached to their belts. Again, VisualRF tracked the devices' paths so that the store's security team could check their camera footage from a specific door at a specific time.

EFFICIENT ROGUE DETECTION AND PCI COMPLIANCE

Cabela's security team uses RAPIDS™, the rogue detection feature of AirWave, as its central point for threat analysis and investigation of potential rogue devices. RAPIDS has driven significant productivity gains in this area through its ability to score and classify potential threats. Because Cabela's stores are in central shopping areas, the company captures huge quantities of rogue data — as many as 20,000 events per day, mostly from neighboring businesses.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW:

Cabela's Incorporated, headquartered in Sidney, Nebraska, is a leading specialty retailer, and the world's largest direct marketer, of hunting, fishing, camping and related outdoor merchandise. Since the Company's founding in 1961, Cabela's has grown to become one of the most well-known outdoor recreation brands in the world, and has long been recognized as the World's Foremost Outfitter.

The company also has some legacy equipment that wasn't always properly recognized. RAPIDS can sift through all of this information and bring the most important threats to the security team's attention via alerts. Along with location tracking in VisualRF, it has helped the security team to remove actual threats much more quickly. "With AirWave being able to monitor Cisco switch ARP/ CDP tables, we know exactly where a rogue client may physically be plugged into the network," Perry commented. "Then, we can proactively close security holes."

Cabela's configured RAPIDS to use the existing Cisco APs for wireless scanning rather than deploying dedicated sensors. This has proven to be a cost-effective solution for the company. The team uses AirWave's PCI compliance report and configuration mismatch information to validate that all sites have a consistent configuration in accordance with security standards that the company has put in place to meet PCI requirements and ensure that customer data stays safe.

FIXING PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY HAPPEN

Putman and the Cabela's team find that AirWave's reporting capabilities have given them a way to spot trends and take action on problems before they affect service quality to users. "AirWave tracks it all: client connectivity time per AP, bandwidth utilization by users and by site, even enterprise-wide information," Perry says. "If I see APs that consistently have high user loads, I can preemptively add service in that area. We have become much more proactive about how we manage the network and much better at capacity planning."



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