



Checkers Drive-In Restaurants, Inc. Cuts IT Cost & Complexity with Aruba's Virtual Branch Networking Solution

As a restaurant chain with over eight hundred distributed locations, Checkers faced the need to securely interconnect each store with the Checkers headquarters network for the purpose of periodic sales data upload and real-time credit card processing. Each store contains a cash register system and a desktop PC for use by the store manager, all linked to an in-store network. To connect back to Checkers headquarters, an MPLS (Multi-Protocol Label Switching) business-class private network connection was ordered from a local telecom provider, and a small router was installed in each store.

While the router-based solution provided the required connectivity, it proved expensive to buy, difficult to install and maintain, and required an average of 60 days lead-time for installation. When problems arose, troubleshooting and resolution could sometimes take weeks. Finally, the network solution lacked key features required to meet the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) which is necessary when processing credit card transactions. As a result, Checkers sought out a simpler, less expensive solution that could meet their security, connectivity, and compliance needs. Aruba's Virtual Branch Network (VBN) solution met those needs. Today, over 120 corporate-owned stores have installed the solution, and plans are being made to offer the solution to franchisees as well.

Aruba Remote Access Point

The new network solution selected by Checkers is based around Aruba's Remote Access Point (RAP). This low-cost device includes multiple local-area network (LAN) ports to connect to the existing in-store network, a Universal Serial Bus (USB) port to which a cellular modem is attached, and an integrated Wi-Fi radio.



Aruba Remote Access Points

Instant Deployment

To install a store network, the RAP is given an initial configuration by Checkers IT, and is then mailed to a store manager for installation. The device requires an Internet connection to link back to Checkers headquarters, and this Internet connection is provided by a standard USB cellular wireless modem, commonly sold by major cellular telephone carriers to provide mobile Internet access to "road warriors" such as sales people. Unlike the previous MPLS connection, which required up to 60 days of lead time and site visits by a phone company technician and a local contractor, the cellular-based Internet connection can be purchased, activated, and installed within a matter of minutes. Once an Internet connection is provided, the RAP automatically forms a secure link to the Checkers headquarters site, from which it downloads its full configuration.



Requirements:

- Lower IT costs by simplifying installation, configuration, management, and troubleshooting of store networks
- Secure credit card processing between stores and headquarters
- Meet PCI requirements for wireless scanning

Solution:

- Aruba AP-70 or RAP-5WN at each store connected to the Internet over wireless cellular network
- Aruba 3000 series controller in headquarters datacenter
- Built-in wireless radio provides continuous monitoring for unauthorized wireless devices
- Cash registers and computers remain connected via existing in-store wired network

Benefits:

- \$5,000 savings per store over 3 years through lower initial and recurring costs
- New sites installed in days rather than weeks or months
- Installations done by store managers rather than expensive IT consultants
- Improved network speed and reliability
- Built-in PCI compliance

Food Service

Meeting PCI Requirements

The PCI-DSS specification was developed by the credit card industry to ensure proper levels of security when handling credit card transactions. PCI compliance has been a top priority for all retailers in the past few years, and Checkers is no exception. One of the requirements of PCI is to conduct periodic wireless scans at each location to ensure that unauthorized wireless devices are not present. In the past, this would have required a quarterly site visit by a qualified technician, but the Aruba RAP automatically performs 24-by-7 wireless scanning, with results instantly sent back to Checkers IT. This greatly lowers the likelihood of Checkers experiencing an embarrassing breach of credit card security, and ensures that PCI auditors are kept satisfied.

Simple Installation Options

Because the Aruba RAP solution requires no local configuration, it can be installed by personnel with no IT experience by following a simple set of instructions. A local store manager need only connect the power cord, plug in the USB modem, and connect a single network cable to the existing in-store network. Within a few minutes after completing this procedure, the network is operational. This saves both time and expense, since no trained technicians need visit each site.

Easy Problem Resolution

The RAP comes with built-in troubleshooting tools that assist Checkers IT in diagnosing and repairing any network problems that develop. Where in the past, troubleshooting sometimes took days or weeks, problems can now be resolved in a matter of minutes or hours. In addition, any Aruba RAP that has been configured for use in the Checkers network is interchangeable with any other RAP. This means that simple sparing plans can be developed – for example, a spare RAP may be kept in the district manager's office where it can be delivered to a store the same day in the event the store's RAP is damaged. Checkers IT organization need not even be aware of the swap, greatly speeding resolution time.

Significant Cost Savings

Without a clear financial impact, technology is just technology. In the case of Checkers, the bottom line is clear. Upon initial installation, each Checkers store saves approximately \$600 in one-time costs, including equipment and contractor fees. In addition, the network is installed and operational in a matter of days rather than months, greatly increasing productivity.

Each store also saves approximately \$120 per month in recurring costs, while simultaneously improving reliability, increasing network speed, and adding the additional benefit of PCI compliance.

Over a three year period, each store saves approximately \$5,000 with the Aruba solution, and initial payback is estimated at approximately 4-5 months.

Summary

By embracing Aruba's new Virtual Branch Network technology, Checkers is among a growing wave of companies squeezing cost out of their IT infrastructure while simultaneously improving service. The solution is a win-win for both Checkers IT, who benefit from much simpler network operation, and Checkers stores who realize significant cost savings while experiencing greater network uptime. The network has now become a competitive advantage for Checkers that will assist the company in their future growth.

Company Overview

Checkers Drive-in Restaurants is the #1 operator of double drive-through fast-food restaurants, with more than 825 mostly franchised locations in about 20 states. Operating under the Checkers and Rally's Hamburgers banners, the restaurants offer a limited menu of burgers, fries, and hotdogs, as well as beverages and shakes.



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