Maxeda DIY Group is a leading DIY retailer in the Benelux. It operates 389 stores across four formats: Praxis and Formido in the Netherlands, Brico in Belgium and Luxembourg and Plan-it in Belgium.

The Group faces a challenge familiar to many others in the retail sector: how to maximise customer spend in an omnichannel world. Maxeda wants to increase online sales while making it easier, more efficient and more enjoyable to shop at a physical outlet.

For Erik Cuypers, Group CIO, Maxeda Group Benelux, the goal is a single view of the customer, with the means to optimise the customer experience at every touchpoint. This means seamlessly connecting those touchpoints, and acting upon the rich amounts of data generated.

“It’s the same customer, whether they’re using our website, our app, a kiosk or shopping in-store,” he says. “For this kind of omnichannel retailing, Wi-Fi is key enabler.”

Cuypers admits the group’s Wi-Fi infrastructure had become less than ideal. With some kit coming to end-of-life, Matt Masterson, IT manager, Maxeda Group Benelux, says there was a lifecycle management opportunity: “It’s safe to say we had not invested heavily in this kind of infrastructure for years. The wireless set-up needed a complete upgrade, and we had a high-level view of some of the new services we could run off an improved network.”

There was also an opportunity to standardise. Maxeda’s Dutch business had one wireless network, the Belgian one had another. “We wanted one solution, one support structure, and a fully aligned business,” says Masterson. “We wanted a common infrastructure.”

The programmability and openness of the Aruba Mobile First Architecture, together with the monitoring and management capabilities it offers, enables us to undertake large-scale deployments in an automated and reliable manner. This will create a true mobile experience for our community.

“Articulating the possibilities

The search for a solution began with a demo from Aruba and local partner SecureLink. This was eye-opening, says Masterson. “We had an idea of how wireless could underpin new services, but it was only when we met Aruba that things started to get real,” he

**UPGRADE AND STANDARDISE THE WIRELESS NETWORK**

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**ARUBA CREATES MOBILE FIRST PLATFORM TO ENCOURAGE OMNICHANNEL EXCELLENCE AT BENELUX RETAILER**

**REQUIREMENTS**

- Create a more mobile retail experience in stores and online
- Enhance customer engagement and revenue streams
- Deliver more tangible IT-enabled services to the business
- Standardise and unify IT infrastructure across stores and franchises

**SOLUTION**

- Aruba 802.11ac High-Density indoor Instant APs with Bluetooth beacons
- Aruba outdoor Instant APs
- Aruba POE-enabled access switches
- ClearPass Policy Manager
- AirWave for network management, monitoring, reporting & troubleshooting
- Meridian platform for mobile engagement
- Aruba BLE Beacons

**BENEFITS**

- Establishes consistent connectivity across 320-plus stores, with standard solution across Belgium and the Netherlands
- Ensures single view and management of network, with means to optimise connectivity
- Enable the means to control and secure customer access
- Creates platform for service innovation: including in-store wayfinding, floor staff with tablets and integration with revamped customer apps
Granular insight into network performance

The solution comprises 2,234 Aruba iAP-315 indoor access points and 20 Aruba iAP-275 outdoor access points across 320 Maxeda stores in Belgium and the Netherlands. Crucially, Aruba AirWave Network Management provides the granular detail to accurately plot coverage in each store, from the small-scale city stores to the large, edge-of-town warehouses.

“We’d budgeted for a straight, like-for-like access point replacement,” says Masterson, “but the beauty of AirWave is that we can see a solid view of Wi-Fi coverage for each location. We can see if the signal is weak or identify blackspots, in real-time and whether we need more or fewer access points.”

This information obtained from AirWave through triangulation and heatmaps, helped plan the roll-out, with the correct number and location of access points for each store. It allows Masterson to monitor the impact of any store changes: “We might like to change a point of sale, in-store, or move some merchandising points. With AirWave, I can see if these changes affect the Wi-Fi strength and can react accordingly.”

OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS TODAY; INNOVATION TOMORROW

The roll-out began in Belgium and gained pace as stores in the Netherlands migrated to the Aruba solution. “It’s fair to say we learned lessons along the way – retail poses unique challenges, given the range of different locations and zero tolerance for network downtime, but the last 150 stores went surprisingly quickly.”

Masterson admits the immediate impact is purely back-office: “We’ve finally standardised on wireless, with one provider. We have a solution that is quick to roll-out, and quick to optimise. Plus, we’re effectively able to manage the network in 300-plus stores from one interface. The next significant milestone, from a business perspective, is when we start to deploy customer Wi-Fi.”

This is where the interesting stuff happens, says Cuypers, “Once we can identify customers, through their log in, we can create heat maps, we can see where they’ve been in-store, we can sync with their loyalty membership.”

In theory, he explains, the company will be able to identify a customer who is browsing for bathroom accessories via the app, then track them as they come in-store and log on to the Wi-Fi. “And if we see they are spending 30 minutes in this section, that gives us a pretty good idea they might be planning a bathroom renovation. Our marketing team can then produce personalised offers.”

The group has 480,000 followers on its social channels, part of a community of ‘makers’. “In-store Wi-Fi will make it easier to identify, engage and inspire this community – closer to the point of purchase,” says Cuypers.

In order to provide a secure and properly integrated store Wi-Fi environment for customers, Maxeda are deploying Aruba ClearPass Policy Manager. They also plan a PoC in two stores to test mobile engagement within their stores based on Aruba Bluetooth Beacons.

Looking to the future

They have opened the door to many near-future innovations, he adds, but the key thing is that IT is now able to go to the business with solid metrics and business outcomes: “We’re not talking bits and bytes, but figures the business understands: customer footfall, in-store heatmaps and optimum store layouts.”

This is transformative stuff. The business plans to overhaul its customer-facing apps and use Bluetooth Beacons to help with in-store wayfinding. There are also plans for floor staff to use tablets, and for customers to log in via social media. All these projects will involve IT.

“A good Wi-Fi environment is more than simply good infrastructure, it’s about the tooling that Wi-Fi provides the business, for example, real-time stock inventory, personalised promotions, heatmapping, directions and expert advice via social channels. Wi-Fi makes it possible to serve our customers better,” concludes Cuypers.