NORTHGATE MARKET STOCKS STORES, WAREHOUSE, AND HEADQUARTERS WITH AI-DRIVEN NETWORKS

Summary

Company:
Northgate Gonzales Market

Industry:
Retail

Business Challenges:
Upgrade wireless network with greater visibility and insight to improve employee and shopper experiences at stores, distribution center, and headquarters.

Technology Solution:
- *Juniper Mist cloud services*
- *Juniper Series of High-Performance Access Points*

Business Results:
- *Transitioned to all-new wireless network in 10 days with no downtime*
- *Improved operations and productivity at 41 stores, distribution center, and headquarters*
- *Gained AI-powered visibility and troubleshooting to optimize wireless experience for 6000 associates using laptops, tablets, barcode scanners, and food scales*
- *Reduced wireless-related trouble tickets by 75%*

When looking for the best selection of authentic, high-quality Mexican products served up with excellent service, shoppers in Southern California drop in on Northgate Gonzales Market. The beloved family-owned grocery chain gives visitors the feeling they are in a Mexican mercado, and the store attracts droves of Latinx customers and fresh food lovers.

In 2019, revenue for the chain's 41 stores topped $1 billion, making Northgate among the top three Hispanic markets in the nation. That same year saw a rip-and-replace of Northgate's business-critical but outdated wireless network. Without a ripple of business downtime, a Juniper network driven by Mist AI™ became a tech VIP in the grocer's distribution center, headquarters, and store locations, improving operations, productivity, and the shopper and employee experience.

Northgate Shops for a Cloud Network Leader

Northgate Market mobilized its business operations a decade ago, outfitting its distribution center, stores, and headquarters with access points connected to the cloud. Wireless quickly became central to every operation in the warehouse, its lifeblood service to customers, and essential to every business task.

Fresh produce, juicy meats, and imported and domestic Latin American grocery goods arrive daily at the warehouse, and workers rely on wearable devices for voice-guided instructions to quickly move inventory in and out to the stores. In the stores, associates depend on reliable Wi-Fi to ring up sales and access business systems, and employees at headquarters connect their laptops and mobile devices to manage financing, marketing, training, and other business needs.

Mobility changed the way Northgate Market did business, and when the wireless network had performance issues, helpdesk tickets flooded into IT.

"Wireless is extremely critical to our business, and it has to work," says Kevin Kreucher, director of IT infrastructure at Northgate Market.

"We took the bull by the horns and deployed Juniper Mist to 41 stores, the distribution center, and corporate office in record time. We scheduled the rollout for 30 days, but we got Juniper Mist up and running in the stores in 10 days."

- Kevin Kreucher, director of IT infrastructure, Northgate Market

The problem was that Northgate's wireless LAN wasn't working. It wasn't reliable, and even if Northgate wanted to stick with its old gear, it could not. The provider planned to sunset its managed wireless solution, and the timeline for the end of service was coming up fast.

While the news wasn't great, Northgate took it as perfect timing for a fresh, more modern wireless do-over. Northgate began searching for a cloud-based platform with the most advanced wireless technology available. Intelligent troubleshooting tools and superior performance were at the top of the shopping list.

"Juniper Mist checked all of our boxes," Kreucher says. "We have a large wireless footprint and Mist AI makes sure it works everywhere and all the time."

Once the decision was made, the IT infrastructure team moved quickly to deploy Juniper® Wireless Services driven by Mist AI. AT&T provides a Juniper Mist™ managed service to Northgate.

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A Grocer's List for Wireless

Mist AI transformed the Wi-Fi from unreliable to a crowd pleaser. Shoppers, store associates, warehouse teams, and headquarters teams are big fans.

Juniper Mist cloud services is built on a modern microservices framework that enables elastic scale to meet a business's digital transformation needs. It focuses on operational simplicity, 100% API-based programmability, and end-user engagement through location services. Mist AI optimizes the Wi-Fi in real time, delivering optimized user experiences for all kinds of mobile and IoT devices. Time-consuming manual IT tasks are replaced with AI-driven automation and self-healing actions.

With its previous wireless LAN, the IT team could never pinpoint what caused the connectivity problems.

"We faced daily complaints about slow wireless and poor coverage, but we didn't know what the problem was," Kreucher says. "We never got any answers about what was happening. We just lived with bad wireless.

"Juniper Mist is awesome. We don't have any wireless issues now."

Now, forklift drivers and workers in the distribution center use their voice-activated wearables to tell them where to find, pick up, and drop off inventory—without giving a second thought to the Wi-Fi. The corporate network connects all employee laptops and mobile devices. In the stores, associates can check for prices and take inventory with handheld scanners and tablets stocked with multiple business apps. Shoppers can securely access guest Wi-Fi.

Shopping Cart Filled with the Best in Wireless

Northgate refreshed the Wi-Fi everywhere, replacing legacy access points with the Juniper Series of High-Performance Access Points and expanding coverage to ensure connectivity everywhere, including parking lots for mobile point-of-sale and curbside pickup.

"We sent Juniper Access Points to the stores, they plugged them in, and it just worked," Kreucher says. "At the warehouse, we got up on scissor lifts, took down the old access points, put up new ones, and validated them. At every location, Juniper Mist was a painless implementation."

There were some unexpected snags, specifically with the food scales in the stores. The scales are outfitted with wireless sensors to take measurements for pricing. When deployed a decade ago, the wireless scales were trendsetters, but the technology had grown old and outdated. The Juniper team took on the engineering challenge and developed a working plan for Northgate.

"The Juniper team went above and beyond to understand the scales and worked tirelessly to solve the problem with a fix," Kreucher says. "We are extremely pleased with the Juniper Mist network solution."

Visibility to Simplify Troubleshooting

Outside the stores, Northgate's warehouse has the most critical assignments, raising the stakes for a smooth network deployment.

"Our warehouse group is very vocal when they have problems," Kreucher says.

Northgate's warehouse has 30-foot ceilings and racks and rows of constantly changing inventory. Drivers speed around on forklifts armed with scanners that direct them to which inventory to pick up and where to move it.

Wi-Fi roaming was tricky at first, until the team fine-tuned configurations.

"Mist AI took dynamic packet captures and we tuned areas so that we now have excellent performance," Kreucher says. "Juniper Mist has a lot of Jedi tools to help us understand what is happening in the network."

Since deploying a Juniper network driven by Mist AI, Northgate has added eight access points to fill performance gaps.

"Every once in a while, we get poor coverage in a particular area of a store," Kreucher says. "With the Juniper Mist dashboard, I can look at the map and know which access point to tweak or where to deploy another access point. I didn't have that kind of visibility before."

The number of trouble tickets related to wireless significantly decreased from each month by 75%. Kreucher attributes the improvement to Mist AI-powered troubleshooting tools.

"With Juniper Mist, we get so much detail," he says. "We can determine the root cause of the problem—coverage, speed, bad access point, or devices—quickly."

Northgate's IT team relies on Mist AI to understand network activity.

"Whenever something goes bump in the night, people blame the network or the Internet," Kreucher says. "Juniper Mist helps us prove it's not the network, or if it is the wireless or a mobile device, we own it and fix it."

Mist AI also helped the network team identify and solve a problem that would pop up each month when additional staff came to stores for an inventory audit. Mist AI identified that the extra devices were consuming all of the IP addresses. Expanding the IP address list on the Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP) server was a simple fix.

"Mist AI helped us figure out what was going on and fix the problem," Kreucher says.

Wireless Win in the Cloud

Juniper Mist is a natural fit for Northgate's cloud-first strategy.

"We've had nothing but positive experiences with Juniper Mist," Kreucher says. "Wireless is trouble-free and that means we can move on to implementing other portions of our strategic mission."

With Wi-Fi that just works, Northgate Market can focus on delighting customers, with its signature meat department, tortilleria, fresh produce, prepared foods, and Latin American grocery goods.

For More Information

To find out more about Juniper Networks products and solutions, please visit www.juniper.net.

About Juniper Networks

Juniper Networks brings simplicity to networking with products, solutions and services that connect the world. Through engineering innovation, we remove the constraints and complexities of networking in the cloud era to solve the toughest challenges our customers and partners face daily. At Juniper Networks, we believe that the network is a resource for sharing knowledge and human advancement that changes the world. We are committed to imagining groundbreaking ways to deliver automated, scalable and secure networks to move at the speed of business.