NaaS Delivers Reliable Network Experiences for UMKC

nile

CIO went looking for a solid Wi-Fi solution, got that and so much more with NaaS

University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) is the largest comprehensive, fully accredited university in the Kansas City area. With its broad curriculum, renowned faculty and enviable student-to-teacher ratio, UMKC strives to provide the most optimal learning experience for students.

Andy Goodenow, UMKC CIO, explains how his IT organization supports that goal. "UMKC prides itself on the holistic environment it offers students. Our role is to provide cutting-edge networking services that make things easier for end users, providing the best customer service experience students can have at a university."

Goodenow is a big believer in the "as-a-service" model, so when UMKC's School of Education, Social Work and Psychological Sciences building was struggling with connectivity, he looked to Nile for a network as a service (NaaS) solution. Not only did Nile solve his wireless problem with always-on connectivity, it strengthened the university's security posture and helped address staffing and supply chain issues.

Industry
Higher Education

Users
1,100

Region
Americas

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Challenge

- High-latency and poor performing Wi-Fi unable to support students, faculty and staff
- Network vulnerable to social engineering and ransomware attacks
- IT hiring issues, current staff mired in low-level tasks
- Long lead times for networking equipment, uncertainty surrounding capital expenditures

Outcome

- Guaranteed wired and wireless connectivity backed by SLAs
- Zero-trust network protects against social engineering, rogue devices and malware proliferation
- Nile 24/7 support enables IT team to focus on high-level initiatives
- Predictable equipment sourcing and costs in NaaS environment

Lightning-Fast, Reliable Wi-Fi

The School of Education, Social Work and Psychological Sciences building serves more than 1,000 students, faculty and staff. Aging wireless equipment, combined with the fact that it's one of the older buildings on campus, resulted in a Wi-Fi situation that couldn't support the school's hybrid learning model.

Nile's extensive, high-definition site survey, included with the service, addressed the connectivity issues the school was facing. Strategic placement of access points and sensors drastically changed the Wi-Fi experience leaving the school with guaranteed connectivity, full-site coverage and high-performance capacity.

"Guaranteed network performance like Nile offers is crucial," says Goodenow. "Network downtime can cost UMKC upwards of $2 million per day."

Goodenow reports that before deploying the Nile network, he physically sat in locations throughout the building to test network connectivity.

"The Nile site survey was eye-opening, they ended up recommending we deploy 250 percent more access points in the building," he recalls. "When the Nile network was in place, I went back to the exact same spots I sat in before the rollout and the network speed was multiple times faster."

Of course, a change this big doesn't go unnoticed by students. Reliable Wi-Fi has certainly improved guest network access. It is now a self-service option running over the wireless network that doesn't require a call to IT support - a boon to today's modern, phone-call-averse students. And for the record, the IT staff has also seen a drop in support calls since the installation.

Zero-Trust Model Creates an Impenetrable Network

Hybrid learning models have led to an increase in devices connecting to the network, leaving it vulnerable to security attacks. Social engineering and ransomware were looming concerns.

"Keeping students safe is a huge priority for the university," says Goodenow. "I like Nile's holistic, zero-trust approach."

Built with security as a foundational element, Nile's network as a service is delivering a zero-trust model by default. With 802.1X authentication across wired and wireless, the network is protected from social engineering attacks. It's now impossible to just plug in and gain access - every user and every device is authenticated before accessing the network. Zero-trust isolation enables security teams to prevent the proliferation of malware, like ransomware, because traffic flows from the user to the firewall and Nile does not allow for peer-to-peer communication.

Securing network access is only one piece of the puzzle- ensuring the traffic and data on the network are secured is also a top priority for Goodenow. By default, traffic on the Nile network is encrypted from end-to-end, thwarting snooping and sniffing.

"The Nile NaaS solution gives us premium Wi-Fi security services that's better than anything we could build ourselves using a standard IT approach."

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Faster Supply Chain. Stronger Staff.

Staffing challenges and supply chain headaches resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic continue to plague organizations worldwide. At UMKC, this means working to find high-level IT talent for hire and long wait times for equipment.

"Across the board, everyone is finding it difficult to acquire specific IT talent, such as security and networking, and we're no exception," explains Goodenow. "But with Nile supporting the education building 24/7, I don't have to have that expertise in person, on staff. That reduces the pressure around hiring in this tight market."

This shift in responsibility is relieving UMKC IT of redundant, tactical tasks, resulting in employees spending time gaining new skills and continuing their learning in their day-to-day roles. And the automation of software upgrades and security patches frees IT to focus on higher-level initiatives and goals.

"In terms of the supply chain, I have tried placing orders for new equipment from other vendors only to be told that the lead time is 463 days - more than a year out," Goodenow recalls.

Nile equipment is sourced and ready to be deployed, eliminating the impact that delays have on the lifecycle management process and facilitating the timely opening of new buildings and facilities.

From CapEx to OpEx: Eliminating Unexpected Cost & Complexity

Goodenow actually comes from a finance background, giving him a unique perspective not common to most CIOs. The ability to offload the responsibility of lifecycle management allowed Goodenow to save some money, deploying his staff in areas where he knew they could excel.

Because Nile delivers the network completely as a service, from Day 0 through Day N operations, Goodenow was even more motivated to transition to this opex-based consumption model. Capital expenditures and unexpected costs are taken out of the equation entirely, complex configurations are eliminated with automated software upgrades and security patches, and hardware refreshes save the team time and money.

"The Nile NaaS solution gives us a premium Wi-Fi and security service that's better than anything we could build ourselves using a standard IT approach," says Goodenow. "We get an extremely high level of quality backed by service level agreements."

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