



IBM Customer Reference

French Connection

Synopsis:

Growing coffeeshop franchise uses IBM Wireless and ThinkVantage technology to provide reliable, secure Wireless access to all of its patrons

Location:

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Industry:

Retail

Focus Area:

Small & Medium Business, Wireless

URL:

<http://www.fcdubai.com>

Customer Background:

Since its founding in 1997, French Connection has become one of the most popular cafés in Dubai. Its success has helped it grow into other Emirates from its original store, which catered to Emirates Airlines crews. Modeled on the French bakery and café, the focus is on customer service and satisfaction, particularly for the businesspeople that make up a large part of its clientele.

Business Need:

French Connection wanted to offer Internet access to customers as a way to extend its customer service and differentiate itself from the competition, but it faced several challenges in implementing the solution. Due to the monopolistic position of Etisalat, the governmental telecommunications company of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there was a high cost attached to dedicated, fixed-line internet access. The customer also needed a low cost infrastructure that didn't require an on-site information technology (IT) specialist. French Connection wanted the flexibility of offering its customers either free or paid Internet access. Finally, it wanted users to feel assured of a secure connection, so they would feel free to do business over the Internet from the cafes. It was important for the solution to be wireless, so that customers could sit anywhere in the building while receiving access, and also so it could avoid unsightly wiring in the cafe's modern décor.

Solution:

French Connection looked to IBM Business Partner VTME for its HotSpots offering, an end-to-end solution that allows hotels, restaurants and cafes to offer wireless Internet access to their customers. The flexibility of the solution allows French Connection to offer access with or without charging the end users. The system uses a Cisco Aironet 1100 Series wireless access point, which is based on the IEEE 802.11b wireless network, to cover the entire two-floor restaurant. The solution leverages Intel technology to support ThinkPad Notebook wireless enablement with Centrino technology. French Connection's bundled solution includes a gateway, one wireless access point and several Thinkpad Notebook computers; French Connection pays a low annual fee for outsourced maintenance of the infrastructure.

The cafe is able to offer its customers use of state-of-the-art IBM ThinkPad Notebooks, or use of a wireless network card for their own laptops. The ThinkPad Notebooks are equipped with the ThinkVantage Technology-Embedded Security Subsystem, providing the laptop with a security chipset, and the Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) protocol. These security features allow French Connection to offer secure access to its virtual private network (VPN), protecting both itself and its customers.

The ThinkPad Notebooks are configured to use the ThinkVantage Technology - Access Connections. Using this system, the laptops automatically detect the wireless network within the cafe and optimize the notebook to provide its user with the highest possible connection speed. This feature ensures smooth Internet access for both French Connection and its customers.

Benefits of the Solution:

French Connection has been able to offer its customers wireless Internet access at no charge, and still see a real ROI for its investment. A simple phone call handles any technical issues, with no need for onsite IT personnel. By offering customers secure access either through their own laptop computers, or through a borrowed ThinkPad Notebook, French Connection is able to offer a service that keeps its customers in its cafes longer, generating higher food and beverage sales. The solution has generated such success that French Connection intends to implement the same solution in more than 10 different locations across UAE.

Customer Quote:

"We regularly have our customers come in, and want a connection. They are often students and business people, so to be able to connect while they dine is important to them.

"Often people having meetings here, so being able to access the Internet is very useful for them.

"Our job at the restaurant is to make our patrons feel at home, and give them good food, not worry about technology."

--Farida Bahar, Manager, French Connection