



Victra – A Verizon Authorized Retailer



- National Verizon Retailer with nearly 1,200 stores in 46 states
- Saved 80% in hardware and operational costs by going with Meraki
- Leverages the Meraki full stack from security appliances, switches, wireless, and more.

Few retailers are given the notable distinction of being named a National Verizon Authorized Retailer for Verizon Wireless, and Victra (formerly A Wireless) has proudly been one for over 20 years. Primarily operating out of Greenville, North Carolina, Victra has 1,200 stores across 46 states, and thousands of employees and guests walking through store doors each day.

Victra is focused on connecting individuals with innovative technology, something Victra also looks for in their IT technology and networking solutions, which is why they chose Cisco Meraki. Stephen Stanton, VP of IT, describes Meraki as being a good fit due to their exponential growth. “If you’re ready to move at lightning speed,” he said, “Meraki is your way to go.”



EVALUATING A NETWORK SOLUTION

When Stanton joined Victra in 2012, there were 120 stores, which has grown tenfold today. As Victra acquired more companies, they also inherited the systems previously installed at each location. To avoid building a network architecture that was a conglomeration of IT systems, Stanton’s team of 15 acted as the first line of defense for security and network management. The previous solution was a cluster of different vendor devices, leaving the network open to a lot of security holes. Stanton looked for something that was as flexible as it was secure, and could scale alongside the growth of the company.

“A Wireless is chaotic, but with Meraki, it’s easy to keep up with the chaos. Everyone else scales at expected rates, while we’re here taking over the whole country.” – Joseph Rivera-Santiago, Lead Systems Administrator

Stores and Locations

1,200

States with Stores

46

IT Team

15

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– Joseph Rivera-Santiago, Lead Systems Administrator

HARDWARE AND LICENSING

On paper, Meraki did not look that different from their legacy networking solutions. When holistically evaluating vendor solutions, Stanton and his team not only looked at hardware and licensing costs, but also ease of management given their limited resources and intent to scale. Getting the security appliances up to date was most important for Victra.

Beyond that, consumer-grade wireless and switching solutions would have been enough for each store location, but they also had the need for the ability to refresh and upgrade after 3 years. With Meraki, all firmware updates are folded into license renewals and there are no additional costs for hardware. With any traditional networking solution, most updates would have been too difficult for Stanton’s team to receive and implement in a reliable, reoccurring manner.

	QTY	MERAKI	PRICE	SUB TOTAL	PREVIOUS	PRICE	SUB TOTAL
Wireless	0	Included with MX	\$ –	\$ –	Consumer-grade (e.g. Netgear)	\$200	\$200
Switches	1	MS220-8P + 3YR License	\$850	\$850	Traditional Switches	\$200	\$200
Security	1	MX64 + 3YR License - Advanced Security	\$1,005	\$1,005	Traditional Security	\$1,400	\$1,400
MERAKI TOTAL				\$1,855	PREVIOUS TOTAL		\$1,800

TABLE 1 - HARDWARE & LICENSING COSTS PER STORE

STORES	QTY	MERAKI HARDWARE COSTS	PREVIOUS HARDWARE COSTS
Existing	670	\$1,242,850	\$1,206,000
Future	500	\$927,500	\$900,000
		\$2,170,350	\$2,106,000

TABLE 2 - TOTAL HARDWARE COSTS FOR ALL STORE

Table 1 outlines the general hardware costs for a single store. Stanton and his team had already deployed 670 stores and expect to open another 500 in later months. Each of these stores will be retrofitted with the same Meraki setup, which costs are outlined in Table 2. Today, Victra is a full Meraki shop with wireless, switching, and security solutions powering the network.

Each Meraki product comes with an enterprise cloud-managed license for 1, 3, 5, 7, or 10 years, which includes 24/7 support, firmware upgrades, and full feature updates. Meraki firmware upgrades are managed over the web and require zero man-hours to implement.

Since Meraki licensing works in aggregate, as new appliances are purchased and added to the network, Victra saw their license expiration date continue to extend without the need for renewals, which was another huge benefit for them.

DEPLOYING AND MANAGING THE NETWORK

One week, Victra was preparing to open nearly 10 stores all at once, but the previous solution wasn't sufficient for that kind of scale. That's when Stanton and his team decided to put Meraki to the test. Lead Systems Admin Joseph Rivera-Santiago led the trial with Meraki MX Security Appliances and MS Switches. Rivera-Santiago spun up the location in half a day, discovering the MX Auto-VPN feature, which enables site-to-site VPN across branches within minutes. Once they realized how easy it was, they hit the ground running.

After creating a standard store template, Rivera-Santiago cloned configurations and applied them to each appliance. All that was left was to change IP addresses and the devices were ready to go. The team could then just ship the appliances with documentation to any non-technical store manager or employee and the appliances would still be up and running. They had never experienced such a smooth deployment process.

With the previous networking solution, Victra would have accrued significant costs both in time and resources needed for any pre and post activity for onsite installations. The legacy solution would have required specific configurations to match the upstream connectivity. That configuration would usually make installations twice as long, four times the cost, and often comes with an intimidation factor, especially if the installer is non-technical. With hundreds of remote locations, Victra would have expected to see incremental charges for onsite contractors, hourly wages, and trip fees.

Fully aware of the frustration that comes with installing and deploying across multiple remote sites, Meraki focuses a great deal on creating a simple and intuitive boxing and un-boxing experience in a step-by-step order that helps with a smooth installation process. The actual installation with Meraki only takes about 30 minutes, especially if the WAN connectivity is already established at the time of installation.

When comparing the total costs for installation and configuration of the previous network versus with Meraki, Victra saved 70% in overall deployment costs, which is detailed in Table 3. This takes into account estimated hourly costs necessary for Network Engineers and Hardware Installers needed for in-store setup. That means for the additional 500 stores still set to launch, with Meraki, it would cost \$57,500 compared to the previous solution which would have cost them \$190,000 in total.

TASK	MERAKI		PREVIOUS	
	TIME (HRS)	COST/YR	TIME (HRS)	COST/YR
Network configuration per store	0.5	\$75	2	\$300
Hardware installation per store	0.5	\$40	1	\$80
Total deployment costs per store		\$115		\$380

TABLE 3 - TOTAL DEPLOYMENT COSTS PER STORE

Deployment costs **70%** lower with Meraki

For Stanton, "Meraki helped significantly with A Wireless's growth" because it changed the day-to-day management for Stanton's team. With so many people on the network at a given time, from guests to employees, Stanton was quick to implement policies that monitored traffic and user bandwidth, limiting usage on social media and streaming sites.

The prior solution used to block URLs with a tool that seemed like a "hieroglyphic language no one understands." It was also very easy to bypass. With Meraki, the team can block websites or ports and apply policy settings to 1,200 endpoints within 5 minutes while still ensuring only permitted traffic was utilized on the network. Victra store managers liked this, because it is a quick fix and enables employees to focus more on selling phones.

Prior to Meraki, "troubleshooting didn't really exist at Victra," so having the ability to see and monitor event logs easily through the Dashboard, a web-based interface that manages Meraki cloud-based solutions, has really helped the team focus their efforts. This was a key factor in deciding to move forward with Meraki since networking costs are not just calculated by hardware, but also time and resources for maintenance and management.

Ongoing maintenance costs are more than 95% lower with Meraki

	MERAKI	PREVIOUS
Existing 670 stores over 3 years	\$226,125	\$7,839,000
Future 500 stores over 3 years	\$168,750	\$5,850,000
Per store over 3 years	\$338	\$11,700

TABLE 4 - TOTAL COST OF MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVER 3 YEARS

For Victra, the total costs associated with managing existing and upcoming stores with their previous solution was more than 95% higher compared to Meraki. As Table 4 summarizes, managing a single store with Meraki is just a fraction of the cost, in time and money, with a traditional solution, especially when looking at the 1,200 stores in aggregate. Victra saves significantly more in the time and manhours it takes to troubleshoot and manage a network, as exemplified by Table 5. Similar to Table 3, Table 5 applies assumptions about hourly costs for managing a Meraki network versus the previous one Victra had. The analysis doesn't include firmware update costs since the previous access points and switches since it seemed too difficult to receive any firmware updates at all.

"For the most part," explained Rivera-Santiago "you see exactly what you need to see [with the dashboard], which helps for quickly solving issues." The dashboard provides visibility that wasn't available, and some of the the IT team's favorite features are often the simplest ones. For example, traffic analysis as a function of Layer 7 visibility provides network administrators with insight into application-level network behavior patterns in graphical representations. This is particularly useful for sharing with non-technical employees, like store managers, who want to see usage patterns of their employees, or high-level executives who are paying the bills.

"Honestly, the word 'troubleshoot' wouldn't describe what I had to do before Meraki," explained Rivera-Santiago. "If there was a problem, I had to drop everything to put out a fire, dig through the nitty-gritty work, and lose a whole day." Someone from the IT team would then have had to manually apply configurations to each device. With 5 to 6 hours per device, and over 200 devices, that was almost a full work week spent on a single issue.

Assumed hourly cost for Network Engineer: \$150		ESTIMATED OCCURENCES	MERAKI		PREVIOUS	
TROUBLESHOOTING		PER YEAR	TIME (HRS)	COST/ YR	TIME (HRS)	COST/ YR
Network configuration per store		2	0.25	\$75	6	\$1,800
Hardware installation per store		1	0.25	\$38	6	\$900
MAINTENANCE (ONCE PER QUARTER)	QTY					
AP Firmware Updates	1	4	0	-	0	-
Switch Firmware Updates	1	4	0	-	0	-
Security Firmware Updates	1	4	0	-	2	\$1,200

TABLE 5 - DETAIL OF COST OF MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Out of Stanton’s team, only 5 people are capable of setting up the previous network, compared to 15 people on the team who can now set up a Meraki network. Only 1 to 2 members are needed for one-off store launches, but when Victra launches hundreds of stores at a time, as with an upcoming rollout of 500 new stores, those 15 people are laser-focused on traffic shaping, setting up voice systems, applying security policies, and more. By worrying less about the “nitty-gritty” work, as Rivera-Santiago described it, Stanton’s team has more time to focus on important projects that enable store managers and employees with a smooth rollout.

	MERAKI	PREVIOUS
Hardware costs per store	\$1,855	\$1,800
Deployment costs per store	\$115	\$380
Ongoing costs per store	\$338	\$11,700
3-yr TCO per store	\$2,308	\$13,880

TABLE 6 - TOTAL TCO PER STORE OVER 3 YEARS



SIX MERAKI STORES CAN BE BROUGHT LIVE FOR THE COST OF ONE STORE COMPARED TO PREVIOUS NETWORKING TECHNOLOGIES

When totalling not just the cost of the physical equipment and licensing for Meraki, but also the full cost of time and resources dedicated to deploying and managing over 1,200 stores, Victra realized a savings of over 80% over 3-years. Table 6 shows the per store comparison of total ownership costs associated with Meraki versus the previous networking solution.

This means that with Meraki, Victra can bring to life 6 stores in the time it would have taken to deploy one store. With those odds, Victra is better equipped to handle their continued scale as their stores take over the country.

“IT’S BEEN EASY, EASY, EASY”

Today, Victra is a full Meraki shop, with a few switches and APs deployed at the corporate offices, and an MX400 as the VPN concentrator with MX60s or MX64Ws at each of the retail locations. Stanton is also using the Meraki MC phones and has tested the Enterprise Mobility Management solutions as well.

The ease of deployment and level of control and visibility that Meraki provides has allowed the IT team to quickly solve problems, which is important for Stanton and his team, “considering IT is never-ending. That is definitely a game changer.” Expanding Victra with the previous IT solution would not only have been more time-consuming, but also significantly more expensive. Meraki products are considered future-proof with a recurring license and one-time purchase of the hardware, which is all-inclusive of future firmware upgrades. When Stanton considered the costs saved over 3 years of management, deployment, and troubleshooting, in addition to the lifetime value of the hardware, Meraki was a “clear winner.” No other solution matched the competitive pricing and scalability of Meraki.

For Stanton and his team, time is a valuable resource, and he is excited that Meraki helps free up time for his team so that they can focus on the next big project at hand.

“It’s been easy, easy easy. Meraki has been so easy to deploy, easy to manage, easy to scale. I honestly don’t see another solution we would have been able to use for this type of growth”

– Joseph Rivera-Santiago, Lead Systems Administrator