

# MAJOR BRANDS INC.

Wireless and ready for growth



## CLIENT SUCCESS STORY



### New network has beverage distributor poised for growth

Major Brands Inc. is Missouri's highest volume distributor of premium wines and spirits. What started as a small family business has grown to four locations with nearly 600 employees. In just the last six years, sales have increased almost 35 percent and the number of employees is up over 20 percent.

Like any company undergoing a rapid expansion, Major Brands is experiencing growing pains. And one of the biggest pain points, although many didn't realize it, was the company's unreliable wireless network. A hodgepodge of equipment, some of it outdated and unsupported, made up the unmanageable network. Wireless performance was poor, and each location had a different system, which complicated things for suppliers and employees who travel among the offices. Not only was it difficult to support the current sales volume, it also made it challenging for the company to continue its upward momentum.

Increased business is always a good thing, if you are ready for it," says Mary Goodman, IT Director. "The impact on the network was the last thing on everyone's mind. Our systems had reached end-of-life. We needed a plan to support not only our current growth, but wanted to look out five years in the future. ASD helped us develop this plan and our ownership was very supportive."

#### Searching for a solution

Realizing that the company was in need of a change, the IT department began a search for a solution. After reviewing several options, they chose to work with Advanced System Designs (ASD), a technology partner that has supported their IBM AS/400 system for a number of years.

"We are comfortable with ASD based on their past performance," says Goodman. "The key is the relationship. They were working with Major Brands even before I was. They really understand the history of our company and how it works. That's a huge plus. Other suppliers just talked hardware; ASD offered a vision."





“ASD has been a partner a long time. They know our business, how it works, how and why the network was the way it was. We were both sailing the same ship and had the same target in mind. There is a real synergy between us.” —David Gossett, Major Brands’ Network Manager.

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ASD proposed a complete redesign of Major Brands’ network infrastructures in its St. Louis and Kansas City locations, improving both its wired and wireless systems. The plan called for all new physical equipment, wireless gear, switches and routers.

### Meeting unique needs

Because ASD has been Major Brands’ technology partner for close to a decade, the company was able to understand the unique characteristics of the business and its four locations. Those characteristics had a profound impact on the design of the system.

“We had to work around what they do,” says Travis Steele, senior technical consultant in ASD’s Network Infrastructure and Security Division. “They have large indoor warehouses that are very long, which affects the wireless range. These warehouses are filled with beverages—and liquid can affect wireless signals and cause failures. We also had to take into consideration their inventory, which fluctuates depending on the time of year.”

Having a reliable wireless system is critical to Major Brands’ operation. Handheld and forklift-mounted wireless bar code scanners manage the inventory as it is received and as product is picked for shipping to customers. Wireless Pick-to-Voice headsets work as an electronic picking slip.

When the warehouses experience outages, signal interruption or poor performance, the lost time adds to Major Brands’ business expenses. And when severe problems develop, customer shipments could be delayed.

“Everything in the warehouse depends on wireless—from shipping and receiving to the just-in-time picking of product for delivery to the customer,” explains ASD’s Alan White, director of consulting services in the Network Infrastructure and Security Division.

### Building the solution

Once the decision was made to do a redesign, ASD began the process with a Wireless Site Survey. This service helps ASD determine what equipment is needed to provide proper coverage for a customer facility. The survey helped ASD produce a design that was proven to work even before it was installed.

Steele explains the process: “We can do a survey anywhere without the need for AC power. The tools allow us to simulate access points. We walked the building many times to see where the signals were weak.”

Because Major Brands operates around the clock, it was important that the majority of the work be done in a way that did not disrupt the business. “Network outage windows are very short,” says White. “So we installed a lot of the solution side-by-side with the existing network equipment. Turning up the new network switches and access point was done in phases.”

Gossett said pre-planning was key to making sure the switch-out was non-intrusive. “We had a good design and plan. We knew what we had to accomplish each day. We had timelines for implementation and everyone knew what pieces they would be responsible for.”

“The process was seamless,” says Goodman. “ASD’s team fit inside our existing team and interfaced seamlessly like they were Major Brands’ employees. They were with us through testing and the whole installation.”

The final switch-over happened over a weekend, with the team working toward a 7 a.m. Monday deadline. “On Monday morning, everything was working and on schedule,” says Gossett.

Working side-by-side on the project helped ASD facilitate a transfer of knowledge to Major Brands’ IT department. “We told ASD what we were comfortable doing and what we were not comfortable with,” recalls Gossett. “They did a good job of making sure we understood the whole process and did a good job of explaining things. But there are some things we don’t want to be experts on. We have enough knowledge to take care of the network day-to-day.”

### A successful project

The network solution developed by ASD has had a significant impact on the company in just a short time. Major Brands has benefited from:

- A 25 percent increase in nightly warehouse bottle production in the Kansas City facility—where weak signals and a slow network had been impacting production for some time.
- Improved overall security.
- Better overall visibility of the system and simpler management for the IT department.

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- The same wireless environment in all four locations, which allows employees and suppliers to connect to the same wireless with no reconfiguration

But perhaps even more importantly, the new system laid the groundwork for future growth. “That’s not something the end users would notice,” says Gossett. “But now we are positioned to grow.”

### Technology spotlight

As part of Major Brands’ technology solution, ASD used Cisco Lightweight Access Points and Cisco Wireless LAN Controllers to assist with configuration changes during inventory fluctuations. Cisco Wireless LAN Controllers can adjust the power and channel for each access point on the fly—so as the warehouse environment changes, the network automatically changes to provide optimal coverage. This feature also provides redundancy—increasing power to surrounding access points if a wireless access point fails.

The Cisco switch network is Layer 3 capable—so VLANs can be configured to segment wireless traffic from wired traffic for better performance and security. The switches also have Power over Ethernet (PoE) capability so that wireless access points can be powered from the Ethernet cable and don’t require AC power in remote warehouse locations. Additional VLANs segment servers in the data center and provide a restricted VLAN for guest wireless access.