



Cape May County Library

- With E-rate funding, Cape May County Library was able to upgrade their network
- Remote troubleshooting removes need to go onsite when there is a network issue
- Simplified network management gives the team time back to work on other projects



Lined with beautiful Victorian houses, surrounded by sandy beaches, and adjoined by a historic lighthouse, Cape May in southern New Jersey welcomes visitors and residents with its local charm. Along with these landmarks, Cape May also has eight library branches serving 83,500 citizens, which provide books, movies, computer resources, and events to its visitors. To keep up with the growing number of visitors logging onto the Wi-Fi network with their own devices, more library computers being added to the wired network, as well as an aging infrastructure, Aaron Day, IT Manager and Network Administrator at Cape May County Library (CMCL), knew it was time for a network upgrade. But with limited funding and big ambitions, Day knew he would need to find additional resources to make the library dreams a reality.

“The fact that I can purchase Meraki equipment, which means I can do more with my time, is facilitated by the fact that it costs less through E-rate. Otherwise, I’d have to buy standard equipment and spend more time configuring and troubleshooting, instead of focusing on other projects.”

– Aaron Day, IT Manager and Network Administrator

E-rate Funding Makes Technology Projects Possible

With legacy Meraki access points deployed across the libraries, Day wanted to upgrade his network to support the continuing demands of library visitors. In order to fund this project, Day needed to look outside of the library’s technology budget. Working with the CMCL Director and a consultant, they applied for E-rate funding to support these projects. After assessing their technology needs, Day submitted an E-rate proposal for their project, and received quotes back from various partners. Based on the discount that they receive with E-rate funding, CMCL was able to save 65% on their networking infrastructure. Without E-rate funding, Day would not be able to put forth the capital required to complete a comprehensive network upgrade.

After receiving their E-rate funding, Day was able to deploy the new Meraki MR33 access points and Meraki MS250 switches across the library branches. The installation was very easy; they just replaced the old access points with the new ones, activated the license in the Meraki dashboard, and they were ready to go. The library has two main SSIDs, one for the public, and a private network for staff. Library visitors log onto the public network through a splash page with the library agreement highlighted, which needs to be accepted before logging on. The private staff network gives access to hosted files and other network drives. The IT team often uses the Meraki dashboard to search for clients when troubleshooting. For security reasons, they block the staff from logging their computers on the public network. Day explained, “Sometimes a staff member tries to connect to the public network without realizing it. We can search the computer name and tell them ‘hey, you’re connecting to the wrong

network' because all of that information is right in the dashboard." They often review the number of clients to see how many people are using the Wi-Fi network and meter bandwidth and make recommendations accordingly.

With the ability to make configuration changes and troubleshoot the network through the Meraki dashboard, Day and his team rarely have to go onsite to the library when there is an issue. They can access everything remotely, greatly reducing the amount of time spent traveling between locations. In addition, Day also uses the Meraki app often to troubleshoot network issues. This makes drop-in visits to the branch much more seamless, since he can make changes to the network right from his phone.

“Through the Meraki app on my phone, troubleshooting is a one minute thing instead of a 20 minute thing. It saves a lot of time, which adds up to us being able to provide a lot more physical services for the public.”

– Aaron Day, IT Manager and Network Administrator

Less Time Maintaining the Network, More Time Serving Library Visitors

With a network that is centrally managed and easier to maintain, the IT team has more time to focus on other library projects and provide new services to library members. They now have VR machines available for patrons to use as well as programs on children's computers for a more tailored kids experience. The IT team also spearheaded the building and setup of a new events portal, which showcases all upcoming library events along with a program to provide MiFi for library visitors to check out and take home. The libraries serve citizens who don't have Internet access at home, and can come to the library to use library devices or their own devices to study, watch movies, or conduct research. None of these programs would be possible without the time the IT team has saved since deploying Meraki across the libraries. Day concluded, "We do the in house work for these library projects, and then set them free."