TP-Link Omada Releases Shepherd Neame Pubs from Lockdown

IT Infrastructure Team Rollout and Configure 27 Wireless Networks in 28 Days

Covid Safe Reopening

During the summer of 2020, Shepherd Neame Brewery faced the daunting prospect of rapidly implementing an ‘order at table’ solution across its 70 managed hotels and pubs. In line with Government Covid-19 guidelines, customers had to be greeted at the door, allocated a table, then order and pay from the designated table. It was, therefore, essential that Shepherd Neame’s iPads and EPOS handsets had a stable and secure connection to process all orders and card payments.

Wi-Fi Infrastructure for Card Payments

EPOS handsets can connect via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi Unlike Wi-Fi, Bluetooth has a limited range and did not cover all the retail space. To ensure that all the tables could be used, and the brewery could maximise capacity inside and out, Shepherd Neame needed a stable, secure and unified wireless network for EPOS handsets to process the hundreds of card payments at each pub, each day. Due to the sheer quantity and spread of sites, the Wi-Fi solution also needed remote network management.

No Time To Lose

A small selection of Shepherd Neame’s pubs already had a Wi-Fi solution as part of its agreement with their EPOS provider. With just weeks to get 27 pubs online, ready for the official re-opening on 4th July, Mark Horken, IT Infrastructure Manager at Shepherd Neame need a cost effective, robust and quick to implement business class Wi-Fi solution that enabled remote management.

4th July Deadline

The Infrastructure Team worked tirelessly for two days to review the business class Wi-Fi solution market and build a spec for 27 individual pubs and hotels. Offering seamless indoor and outdoor wireless coverage with remote management capabilities and no ongoing license fees. The Omada range quickly reached the top of the shortlist. Without the luxury of time on their hands, the Infrastructure Team placed an initial order for 10 TP-Link Omada EAP225, EAP225-Outdoor access points and Omada Cloud Controller OC200 with their regular IT provider, Bechtle. The first order was placed trusting the solution would work - out of the box, providing the reach and functionality need for the first and most critical pubs to open safely on 4th July.

27 Networks in 28 Days

Within 2 weeks of building the project spec, the Infrastructure Team were on-site implementing the Omada solution. With no time to source contractors, Mark and his team rolled up their sleeves and took charge of the implementation. Armed with rolls of cable and drills, the pair completed installations and network configuration across 27 locations in just 28 working days, sometimes getting two pubs online in one day. “The Cloud Controller was worth its weight in gold. It meant we could batch configure all the access points at each pub in one go, saving loads of time, so we could move on to the next one,” reflected Mark.

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Power Over Ethernet

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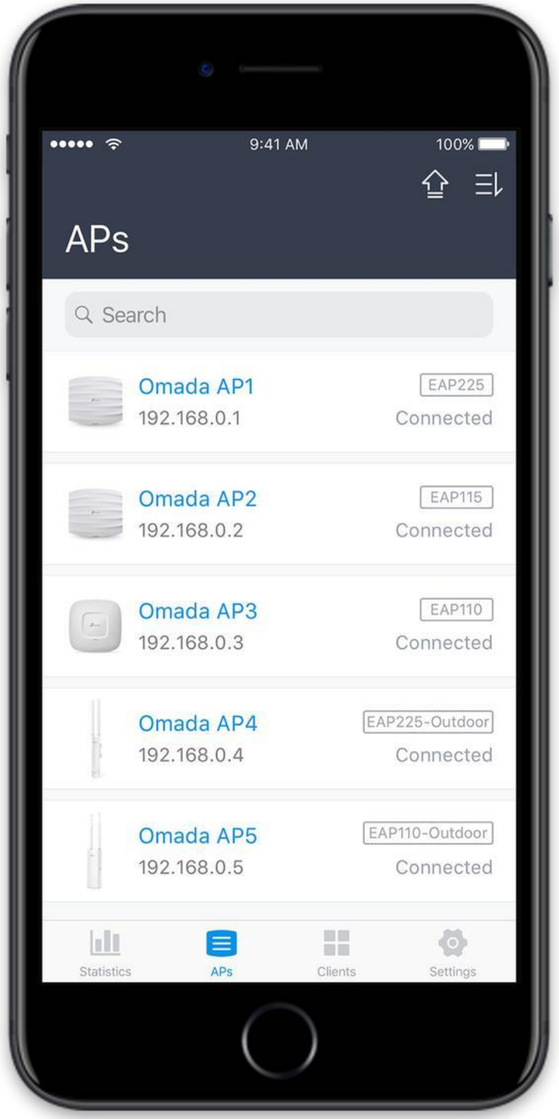
Shepherd Neame

For some pubs, a single Omada access point provided sufficient coverage for the whole retail area. In larger sites, a combination of up to 3 indoor and outdoor access points had to be installed. The access points at each site are powered by the TP-Link TL-SF1005P 5 Port PoE switch. “I just needed a single mains electrical socket for the 5 port TL-SF1005P PoE switch to power all the access points, all we had to do was run the cable. The TL-SF1005P switch was perfect, it had sufficient PoE budget to power 3 access points, leaving us with two ports, one for the uplink and one for the Cloud Controller,” said Mark.

Seamless Wi-Fi Coverage

Wi-Fi coverage had to be seamless. There was no time for the handheld card processing devices to reconnect to the next access point as front of house staff moved from one access point to the next within the pub and its gardens. “Using Omada access points throughout, we could configure the network with a single SSID. This meant the EPOS didn’t have to reconnect to a new access point causing delays for servers. The payment process is as important to the customer experience as the overall service, food and drinks,” commented Mark.



Remote Management

The Cloud Controller was vital. With so many sites and Government guidelines encouraging anyone who could work from home to do so, remote management was essential. By installing the Omada OC200 Cloud Controller at each site, Mark and his team had a live view of the network at each pub. Via the Omada app, they could make tweaks at individual pubs without leaving their chair. To keep the EPOS systems online, Mark and the team use the Omada app to adjust individual pub network configurations and keep payments flowing in real-time.

“The Omada system means we can be proactive. The app gives us a live view of the network as a whole, and we can dive into individual access points if necessary. We’ve got eyes on 27 individual networks from home, and we’ll change a channel here or reboot an individual access point there to keep all the sites running smoothly.”

Cloud Control

Thinking ahead, Mark and his team configured the Omada app to send automatic alerts if there is an issue with any of the networks. “Since the Omada install, we haven’t had any issues with the network. We’ve taken the precaution of setting up alerts just in case an access point goes down. We can even reboot individual access points remotely to make sure that the front of house team have complete coverage and can process payments without a hitch," said Mark.

Robust Business Class Wi-Fi Infrastructure

Talking about the project, Mark commented, “This was not a planned infrastructure investment. It was an essential purchase that meant we could re-open strategic sites. Because it wasn’t something we had budgeted for, the overall cost was an important consideration. It turns out that with the Omada range we didn’t need to sacrifice functionality to get a solid business-class wireless network for an average of £300 per pub.”

Hardware Solution

Shepherd Neame purchased the following hardware to provide a seamless, remotely managed network for 27 pubs and hotels.

- 28 x OC200 Omada Cloud Controller
- 28 x TL-SF1005P 5-Port 10/100Mbps Desktop PoE Switch with 4-Port
- 37 x EAP225 AC1350 Wireless MU-MIMO Gigabit Ceiling Mount Access Point
- 33 x EAP225-Outdoor AC1200 Wireless MU-MIMO Gigabit Indoor/Outdoor Access Point

About Shepherd Neame

Britain’s oldest brewer Shepherd Neame has been based in the market town of Faversham, Kent for over 300 years. Perhaps best known for great British classic ales, such as Spitfire, which carries the Royal Warrant, its diverse portfolio includes Five Grain Lager, Bear Island East Coast Pale Ale, and Bear Island Triple Hopped Lager, and the Whitstable Bay Collection. It also brews international lagers under licence including Samuel Adams Boston Lager. The independent family business boasts an award-winning visitor centre, and more than 300 pubs and hotels throughout London and the South East.