

OCEAN STATE JOB LOT

Ruckus Wi-Fi Provides Stable, Pervasive Coverage for 1.5 Million Sq. Ft. Warehouse



CASE STUDY



OVERVIEW

Over the past 41 years, Ocean State Job Lot has created an enthusiastic, loyal customer base. Customers love the adventure of shopping an ever-changing array of high-quality, good value closeouts. All of the merchandise goes through the Job Lot's 1.5 million square foot distribution center. However, the warehouse Wi-Fi coverage was spotty, resulting in productivity issues for employees. Job Lot's IT team began searching for a new Wi-Fi solution that offered better coverage and reliability and delivered the best value.

CHALLENGES

- Wi-Fi coverage in the distribution center was so poor that employees had to stop and search for signals to use their RF scanning guns
- There was no Wi-Fi at corporate headquarters
- Other inventory management processes were constrained by Wi-Fi signal availability

SOLUTION

- 75 indoor Ruckus APs
- 8 outdoor Ruckus APs
- Dual Ruckus ZoneDirector Controllers

BENEFITS

- Distribution center now has pervasive, reliable Wi-Fi coverage
- Wi-Fi-enabled corporate headquarters gives staff the flexibility to meet and work anywhere
- Stable, high-performance Wi-Fi coverage enables enhanced stocking flexibility in the distribution center

STABLE, STRONG WI-FI KEEPS EVER-CHANGING INVENTORY MOVING IN 1.5M SQ FT DISTRIBUTION CENTER

At a time when many big-name brick-and-mortar stores have closed, Ocean State Job Lot is flourishing. The closeout retailer has a devoted customer base that loves the "adventure shopping" experience that's offered by Job Lot.

Job Lot's tractor trailers—emblazoned with "Home of Adventure Shopping"—crisscross New England, delivering products to over 130 stores. The privately held company, which just celebrated its 41st anniversary, stresses providing extraordinary value for hard-working families. And pursuit of value means that Job Lot doesn't focus on specific product categories. Its merchandise is eclectic and surprising. Customers love the unexpected—and it keeps them coming back for a new adventure.

Now imagine the challenges of warehousing this constantly changing inventory of items of all shapes and sizes. Most products are moved through Job Lot's 1.5M square foot distribution center in North Kingstown, Rhode Island. The building has 44-foot ceilings and storage space for 88,000 pallets of goods.

When Hugo Otero joined the company as senior network administrator, he was surprised to learn that the distribution center's Wi-Fi had areas of weak signals. Employees use RF guns to scan inventory. "The Wi-Fi signals were weak in areas that would cause the staff to stop scanning and walk a few aisles over to get a signal, forcing staff to stop scanning and walk around looking for a signal," says Otero. "Clearly our Wi-Fi was in need of an upgrade."

Otero reached out to Toby Burrell, sales director with SAB Solutions for recommendations on Wi-Fi providers to evaluate. SAB Solutions recommended Ruckus knowing that the Ruckus BeamFlex solution would outperform any vendor.

RUCKUS SIGNAL STRENGTH CONQUERS THE VASTNESS OF (WAREHOUSE) SPACE

A warehouse can be a particularly hostile environment for Wi-Fi. Think vast spaces and lots of metal shelving, not to mention crates, boxes, packing material and electronics. SAB suggested wiring up one AP from each vendor and let the best signal win. "We walked around to see how far we could get before the signal weakened—or dropped entirely when it hit metal shelving or other interference," says Burrell.

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“Now our process doesn’t have to adapt to network access—the network supports how we work. It’s the stable, high-performance Wi-Fi you want to support backend operations. And the dynamic environment of a retailer like Job Lot.”

HUGO OTERA

Senior Network Administrator
Ocean State Job Lot

The Ruckus signal strength left everyone else in the dust. “No other product came close to the Ruckus range. Frankly, we didn’t expect it to be that dramatic,” says Otero. “Their BeamFlex technology does an incredible job of extending coverage in this huge space. Ruckus APs mitigate interference better than anyone else we tested. They won on performance, no question.”

But this is Job Lot, where quality and value are two sides of the same coin. So how did Ruckus perform on value?

“Some of the vendor proposals were so convoluted that it was almost impossible to figure out what their solution would actually cost us,” says Otero. “One vendor’s maintenance costs went up dramatically after the first year. That’s an unpleasant ‘gotcha’.”

Otero was also wary of how many APs he’d have to buy—would it be double the number that they had currently? Triple? “Actually, it wasn’t even as many as we originally ordered,” says Burrell. “Once we started deploying, we shipped a bunch of APs back. We just didn’t need them. The ink wasn’t even dry on the proposal, and we saved Job Lot money.”

Once the Ruckus APs were deployed, employees were able to connect and stay connected. “We solved the productivity problem like flipping a switch,” says Otero. “We also installed Ruckus outdoor APs that covered the whole trucking depot, where there was no Wi-Fi previously,” says Otero. “The trucks are located in multiple lots, and they have continuous coverage as they move from lot to lot.”

In a follow-up project, Otero deployed indoor and outdoor Wi-Fi in Job Lot’s three-story corporate headquarters. In the office the wired-only infrastructure kept them tied to their desks. “Once the Wi-Fi went in, people were free to meet anywhere, with anyone, and still stay connected to their files and projects,” says Otero. “That mobility and flexibility completely suits the culture of our company, and people love it.”

DISCOVERY OF THE UNEXPECTED VALUE

Getting the value and performance you expect from a product is a great feeling. But it’s pretty exhilarating to get value beyond what you expected.

For example, Otero’s team is looking at using the integrated mesh capability in Ruckus APs to link wirelessly from headquarters to a remote office facility, saving on the cost of cabling between the two buildings.

The Ruckus ZoneDirector management system is enabling the IT team to respond faster to users. “Before, if we got a trouble ticket, we’d have to let the employee know that we’d look into the problem when we got back to the office. Now we can open support tickets wherever we are. Ruckus management has simple, well-designed workflow and automates a lot of repetitive, low-level tasks to save us time.”

But, Otero adds, the IT team doesn’t actually spend much time troubleshooting problems with the Ruckus Wi-Fi. “The network pretty much runs itself. Even configuring and deploying new APs requires few steps and little time.”

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The old Wi-Fi APs didn't offer strong security, but now the IT team can set up SSIDs in minutes. "We have at least 15 SSIDs to segregate network traffic," explains Otero. "We can keep network traffic in the distribution center separate from the corporate users. We can give vendors and guests network access whenever they're on site. Being able to segment and secure network traffic so easily gives us a lot more flexibility in how we do business internally and with external partners."

Lastly, having high-performance, stable Wi-Fi in the distribution center is making it easier to reconfigure shelves and aisles to match Job Lot's ever-changing inventory. We're not just doing things faster with Wi-Fi, we're doing things differently. That's exactly the kind of infrastructure we want to support our dynamic, growing business." Which is fitting, because that's the same kind of constant discovery that embodies the Job Lot shopping experience.

"This is exactly what we want to achieve with our solutions. We don't have to spend time fixing what we just installed. Our conversations with the Job Lot IT team are about what comes next—what new applications can we support with the Ruckus Wi-Fi infrastructure."

TOBY BURRELL

Sales Director
SAB Solutions



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350 West Java Dr., Sunnyvale, CA 94089 USA

www.ruckusnetworks.com