

Casting a Net

Annapolis Wireless Internet and Nortel chart a course for citywide Wi-Fi.

The small, bayside city of Annapolis, Md., has played an integral role in American history since its incorporation in 1708. Named for then Princess Anne of Great Britain, the city was once temporarily the U.S. capital.

Now Annapolis Wireless Internet is working to add its name to the city's story. Seeing a need that had yet to be met, the company partnered with Nortel and set out to bring free, advertising-supported Wi-Fi Internet access to all Annapolis residents and thousands of tourists that flock to the city each year.

Smooth Sailing

Nortel has long considered smaller cities important in its wireless network efforts, not just the huge, sprawling metropolises. So when Annapolis Wireless President Philip McQuade sought a partner to help get his vision of free wireless Internet off the drawing board and into the streets of Annapolis, Nortel fit perfectly.

McQuade needed flexibility, experience and support. After sifting through the multitudes of solution providers, only Nortel truly fit the bill. Although many companies promised to deliver the Wi-Fi connectivity McQuade was after, none seemed to carry the credentials Nortel did.

"What's important to me is how a company chooses to stand behind their product, their customers — or their potential customers — and move forward," said McQuade. "In terms of the solution, it works well. A lot of the things we looked at were how they function as a business and how flexible and easy to get along with they are, and they've turned out to be a wonderful group of people to work with."

Cities like Annapolis are ideal for citywide Wi-Fi projects. The city bustles with tourists and modern, tech-savvy residents — many of whom rely on Internet access to do business. Annapolis Wireless' plan to offer free, advertiser-supported access meshed well with the needs of citizens and visitors alike. To increase value



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for end-users, Annapolis Wireless avoided bombarding users with ads. Instead, ads are limited to the initial sign-on page. The sign-on page, which doubles as the Annapolis Wireless home page, is more than a site for companies to pitch their wares. In addition to ads, the site features useful information for both Annapolis residents and visitors.

"Annapolis gets a lot of visitors, so we have a lot of people logging on for the first time and they're looking for something, so our landing page is laid out as a directory," McQuade said. "It's very helpful, and a lot of people appreci-

ate it. If they're going to get online to look for something they're presented with a directory of local businesses."

Currently covering most of downtown, Annapolis Wireless is an innovative endeavor. Various business owners were approached about mounting the Nortel equipment on their buildings and structures. In some cases, the deal was free advertising. In others, it was simply the pleasure of having free Internet access.

Furthermore, thanks to Nortel mesh network technology, the Wi-Fi access points throughout

the city share bandwidth, meaning far fewer access points need to be hardwired.

“Let’s say you have 20 access points out there. You’d only need to wire three of them for Internet access, then they communicate amongst themselves. That’s a real benefit,” McQuade said. With a traditional network, each access point requires a wired bandwidth connection, he said. “With mesh, you don’t.”

The Nortel Difference

With so many companies offering wireless solutions, it can be daunting to choose one that fits. For McQuade and Annapolis Wireless Internet, Nortel’s commitment to its customers and focus on cities like Annapolis made the choice clear.

“It boiled down to a couple of things. We wanted a company that has been around for a while, a reputable company,” explained McQuade.

Nortel has designed, installed and launched hundreds of wireless networks for many of the world’s leading operators in more than 70 countries.

“Beyond that, it was important that they do other things,” McQuade said. “For instance, there are manufacturers out there for just mesh network solutions. That’s all they do. That’s not helpful when we start to look at things like WiMAX backhaul and various other applications. As a wireless Internet service provider, we want to be able to use Nortel across the board. That gives us continuity in terms of business development.”

More than just wireless mesh, Nortel helps to enable the entire municipal solution — from business model to access technology, value-driven applications and turnkey services. Nortel showcases these complete solutions at its Solutions Innovation Center in Research Triangle Park, N.C., which also provides testing and integration services.

The increased flexibility doesn’t cost more, McQuade said.

“We found when you price them against most of the other vendors, they’re right on par if not a little less.”

Beyond pricing, scalability and flexibility, McQuade said he values the personal connection that resulted from Annapolis Wireless’ partnership with Nortel.

“It makes it easy to deal with one vendor because you know everybody you’re going to be dealing with,” he said. “You know the engineers. There’s one call. You can reach anyone you need to — and that’s important when it comes to having someone there who can help you.”



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