

## WHITE PAPER:

### Guest Wi-Fi for the Next Normal

*Offering free Wi-Fi is more important than ever for boosting sales and enhancing the customer experience*





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consumer demand for guest Wi-Fi services has not diminished amid the COVID-19 pandemic. On the contrary, wireless connectivity has become even more important. Customers are using their mobile devices to place orders, make contactless payments and more, making secure reliable Wi-Fi an essential part of today's business operations.

But guest Wi-Fi isn't just a cost of doing business. It can drive real business value for organizations that take the right approach.

When properly implemented, guest Wi-Fi allows organizations to collect invaluable data that creates a 360-degree view of the customer. Armed with this data, organizations can provide personalized communications and content that drive sales and create a richer customer experience.

Of course, security and data privacy are essential to the success of such initiatives. Organizations looking to capitalize on the benefits of guest Wi-Fi must take steps to protect customers from threats and to meet increasingly stringent privacy mandates.

This whitepaper explains how organizations can leverage guest Wi-Fi to boost revenue, increase customer loyalty and drive marketing initiatives. Organizations will come away with a basic understanding of the tools and techniques needed to develop an effective guest Wi-Fi strategy.

## HOW GUEST WI-FI WORKS

A properly designed and implemented guest wireless network provides visitors with Internet connectivity while preventing unauthorized access to corporate data and applications. Isolating guest Wi-Fi from the corporate network also prevents the spread of malware from visitors' mobile devices, and helps organizations adhere to regulatory compliance requirements for data security and privacy.

That basic definition allows for wide variations in how guest Wi-Fi is implemented. Some organizations simply allow visitors to access the wireless network as soon as they come in range. Most, however, require some action before access is granted. At minimum, users are presented with a web page called a "captive portal" that displays the organization's acceptable use policy. Users must agree to the policy before gaining access to the network.

Some organizations require guests to enter login credentials or sign into the network via a social media account. This improves marketing efforts and enables more granular access controls — loyal customers and contractors, for example, can be given higher priority access than other guests. However, security must be balanced with ease of use. Complex login processes frustrate users and waste the time of employees who have to help visitors connect to the guest network.

In addition to access controls, guest Wi-Fi networks should incorporate bandwidth management and content filtering features. Organizations should limit the amount of time spent on a guest network to ensure that the user is incapable of staying connected indefinitely. Additionally, the guest network firewall should block access to illegal, inappropriate or malicious content that could put the organization at risk. Again, different classes of service can be provided to different categories of guest users if unique logins are required.

### **Enforcing the Acceptable Use Policy**

Asking guests to agree to the acceptable use policy is not sufficient — the guest Wi-Fi network should include a policy enforcement mechanism that automatically blocks any inappropriate use. Because guests may access the network via a wide range of smartphones, tablets and laptops, using both browsers and mobile apps, the security solution must be able to enforce the policy across all devices and applications.



## **OPTIMIZING THE CAPTIVE PORTAL**

While many organizations give little thought to the design of the captive portal, it plays an important role in the customer experience. The captive portal should feature the organization's logo, colors and branding, and should be easy to navigate on a mobile device. If credentials are required, guests should be presented with clear instructions on how to log into the network.

From there, the options are virtually limitless. The captive portal can present guests with advertisements and messaging based upon a wide range of criteria, including time of day, location or membership in a loyalty program.

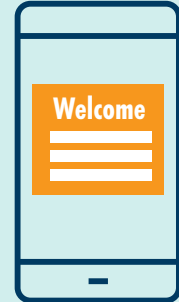
Behind the scenes, the captive portal can capture a wealth of information about guests. For example, the length of user sessions provides insight into how the guest wireless network is being used. Data on the ads or special offers viewed, and whether the guest interacts with them, helps marketing teams fine-tune and better target messaging.

If unique credentials are required, the captive portal can provide marketing teams with data on repeat visits and dwell times, even allowing marketing teams to make instant offers upon guest arrival to incentivize the purchase of hot-ticket items. Best-in-class captive portals give organizations granular control over bandwidth consumption, making it possible to give premium or loyal customers more bandwidth than other users.

## SageNet's Captive Portal

There are many captive portal products on the market, but most of them are limited in terms of customization. SageNet sits down with each customer to determine what information the organization would like to capture and the specific functionality needed. In most cases, the customer's IT and marketing teams are involved in this process as stakeholders.

SageNet continues to advance its captive portal technology, with device tracking, physical zone mapping, loyalty system integrations, API ties to CRM resources for automated data sharing, and enhanced comparative analytics. One-time enrollment of all customer devices enables hassle-free access on return visits.



## HOW GUEST WI-FI DELIVERS VALUE

Guest Wi-Fi delivers value in two primary ways: preventing lost revenue and driving increased revenue. The first component can be difficult to measure, but it is very real. Customers have come to expect wireless connectivity, and many will not patronize businesses that do not offer it. This is particularly true in the hospitality sector — 94 percent of respondents to a recent survey said that free Wi-Fi is a must-have amenity. Increasingly, however, customers expect organizations in retail, healthcare and other industries to offer guest Wi-Fi.

It's important to note that a poor Wi-Fi experience may be as detrimental as not offering the service at all. Customers may not return if the wireless connection is spotty or slow. Worse, they may complain about it in online reviews. Therefore, ROI depends upon investments in a high-quality solution and ongoing monitoring and management of the network.

The revenue gains from guest Wi-Fi come from increased customer loyalty and an enhanced customer experience. Every time a guest connects to the network, the data should be captured and integrated into the organization's CRM database. Knowing the date, time, location and frequency of connection to the Wi-Fi network enhances the customer's profile by correlating behaviors with past purchases and personal preferences.

Analytics tools can leverage Wi-Fi data to automatically push out customized content to each guest, often in real time, and to target promotions based upon the customer's movement through the facility. Organizations can also identify prospects who have not yet made a purchase and repeat customers who might be candidates for loyalty program membership or targeted sales efforts.

With permission, organizations can also collect email addresses, mobile phone numbers and demographic data in exchange for providing free wireless access. This information can be used to drive opt-in email, text messaging or social media campaigns, and to develop audience profiles for online advertising. Additionally, traffic analytics can identify which social media sites are visited most to help determine where marketing dollars should be invested.

## Use Case: Extending the Dining Room with Wi-Fi Connectivity

With indoor dining constrained by social distancing requirements, many restaurants are expanding their outdoor dining areas. It isn't as simple as moving tables and chairs outside, however. Restaurants need Wi-Fi connectivity to support their point-of-sale systems and other devices, and to provide guests with the Wi-Fi service they've come to expect.

Outdoor Wi-Fi requires robust security to prevent data breaches and ensure PCI compliance. Restaurants should also implement a captive portal that limits the duration of user sessions during busy times of the day, and shuts down the guest network after business hours.



## ADDRESSING PRIVACY CONCERNS

When developing a guest Wi-Fi strategy, organizations should ensure that they meet the requirements of increasingly stringent privacy regulations. If the guest network captures data that can be traced to a particular individual, procedures should be put in place for handling requests to view, modify or delete that data.

Traditionally, privacy laws in the U.S. focused on requirements for notifying users in the event of a data breach. However, the European Union (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has changed the emphasis by bringing greater accountability over the use of personal data. Organizations that handle the personal data of EU citizens have been required to gain express consent for data collection and storage and implement stringent data governance practices.

The California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), which went into effect Jan. 1, 2020, incorporates some of the concepts of the GDPR by giving California consumers greater control over the collection and use of their data. Under the CCPA, California residents have the right to know what data has been collected, to access that data and to have that data deleted. The CCPA's definition of personal information goes beyond the traditional data elements covered by most data breach notification laws to include biometric information, Internet activity and more.

Other states are considering laws similar to California's, so it may make good business sense to implement sound data privacy practices surrounding all data collected by the guest Wi-Fi network. Additionally, organizations that utilize the data for marketing campaigns will need to comply with federal, state and international anti-spam regulations.

## How SageNet Meets Regulatory Requirements

SageNet's captive portal was designed with privacy regulation in mind. It obtains permission from the user to collect personal information and has a process for handling the management of that data. Organizations can also incorporate opt-in boxes for email campaigns and other marketing activities.



## CONCLUSION

Consumers have long demanded that businesses offer free, high-quality Wi-Fi connectivity. The COVID-19 pandemic has made guest Wi-Fi an even greater business imperative, as organizations need to enable an even wider range of mobile applications and services.

However, the vast amounts of data generated and collected by wireless networks can help organizations maximize the value of guest Wi-Fi through revenue gains. Analyzing this data for patterns enables organizations to better understand customers, target promotions and content, and create a positive experience for customers that builds loyalty and increases sales.

To be successful, organizations need a robust and secure Wi-Fi network, and a captive portal that captures the right data and provides control over Wi-Fi usage. The right solution will also provide analytics capabilities while ensuring compliance with increasingly stringent privacy regulations.

## ABOUT SAGENET

SageNet is passionate about trusted connections. The company believes that by creating, discovering and nurturing trusted connections with its customers, associates and community, SageNet enhances the world that connects us all.

As a leader in managed network and cybersecurity services, SageNet connects, manages and protects technologies and devices across the enterprise. SageNet's collaborative approach provides peace of mind and systems-confidence that empowers an organization to focus on its core mission.

The company offers world-class service and support via its three US-based 24/7 Network Operations Centers (NOCs) and Security Operations Centers (SOCs), geographically-diverse teleports, a central National Logistics Center, multiple data centers, and a nationwide field service organization.

With a three-decade track record in managed services, SageNet boasts a long-term customer base that includes the nation's largest retail, healthcare, financial, utilities and energy organizations. SageNet manages communications at more than 220,000 endpoints. Headquartered in Tulsa, SageNet has regional offices in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago and Philadelphia.