

Prestonsburg, KY

"I knew there was a better mousetrap out there, and Meraki was it. There was an order of magnitude difference between other vendors and Meraki."

Brent Graden, Economic Director, Prestonsburg, Kentucky

Challenge

Provide free wireless to an entire city and outlying valleys

Attract new businesses to the town with the WiFi amenity

Provide connectivity to underserved communities for education and telemedicine applications

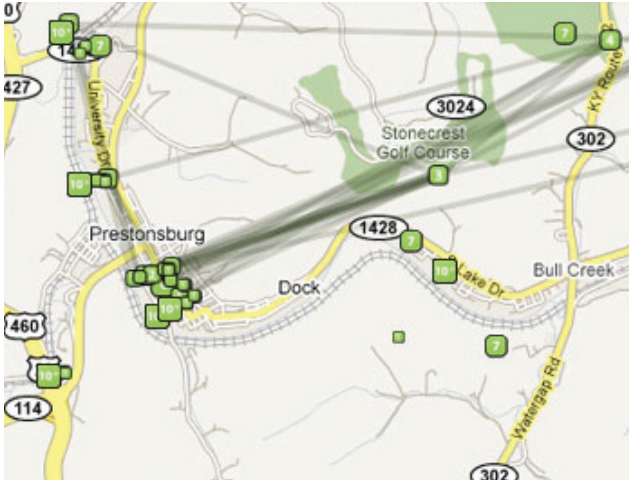
Results

Coverage across 2 linear miles of city and nearby rural areas

Network has 6,000 regular users

Meraki's community messaging platform partially covers network cost

Free WiFi has attracted new businesses: including six restaurants, three national retailers and two light industrial companies



As Economic Director for the city of Prestonsburg, Kentucky, Brent Graden decided to “be aggressive and take some chances to attract business with technology.” Item #1 on his agenda was to provide free wireless internet access to the entire town of Prestonsburg, Kentucky.

Known primarily for being situated on the legendary “Country Music Highway,” Prestonsburg is a classic underserved community, nestled in the beautiful foothills of the Appalachians, and is in the process of transitioning its economy from coal mining to light industry and tourism.

When Graden embarked on his mission to provide wireless for residents and visitors, he began with the usual suspects, including Radiant Networks, Nortel, and Southeast Telephone. The first several quotes came in at between \$100,000 to \$250,000 to cover the city, based on access points that cost as much as \$15,000 apiece. “City Hall had agreed to give me \$8,500 for a proof-of-concept rollout. They weren’t going to get much bang for their buck at that rate,” Graden said.

When Graden read an article about Meraki in a magazine, he was intrigued. “I knew there was a better mousetrap out there, and Meraki was it,” he said. “There was an order of magnitude difference between other vendors and Meraki,” he said.

And while price was the #1 reason Graden settled on Meraki, it wasn’t the only reason: “It came down to economy of scale, and that it was so easy to use and accessible. If you can plug in a light bulb, you can do this.”

To initiate the project, Graden deployed one Indoor repeater and 3 Outdoors along the downtown’s main street. When the test proved successful, he followed with 48 Outdoor repeaters and 12 more Indoors, connected to 5 DSL lines. Restaurants and other local businesses volunteered to host repeaters in their front windows to extend the signal. Soon the network encompassed the entire two linear miles of Prestonsburg’s city center. Graden says the network now has about 6,000 regular users.

A major hurdle for Graden has been extending network access to the small canyons, or “hollers”, that lie between the foothills. (A famous Prestonsburg-area native, Loretta Lynn, grew up in one of the local hollers, the daughter of a coal miner.) Because many of the residents of these remote places rarely come to town, Graden hopes the Meraki network will enable telemedicine applications to provide quality medical consultations to the underserved locals.

Like many other cities and towns, Prestonsburg remains eager to distinguish itself, and offering wireless Internet access is an easy way to make an impression when courting new

businesses or attracting travelers. In fact, Graden leveraged WiFi as a competitive advantage when convincing new businesses to set up shop to the area, including six restaurants, three national retailers and two light industrial companies.

