

CASE STUDY

Manchester City Council



Fast, reliable, user-friendly Wi-Fi delivers “digital inclusiveness” to citizens of Manchester

About the Customer

Science, technology and innovation have long been part of Manchester’s DNA. As the first region to secure devolved powers from Westminster, Greater Manchester, specifically Manchester City Council, has redoubled its commitment to making the city one of the most forward-thinking in Europe, investing strongly in digital industries and putting the public at the forefront of its strategy.

Promoting “digital inclusiveness” is central to this vision. In its drive to become a truly connected city, Manchester has sought to harness the benefits of ultrafast broadband for the benefit of its citizens whilst offering free, high-quality Wi-Fi in many public places. As well as improving the overall quality of life, a key aim was to bring internet access within easy reach of new, previously excluded groups and communities, thereby enhancing democracy, opportunity and social cohesion.

Led by CIO, Bob Brown, Manchester City Council has developed “Our ICT Strategy” which details ICT as a key enabler to transform the organisation, deliver new technologies to Manchester’s residents and act as the vanguard to the digital revolution in Manchester.

The Challenge

To realise this ambitious vision, Manchester City Council needed to install fast, reliable and user-friendly Wi-Fi across a comprehensive array of public buildings. These ranged from libraries and leisure centres to historic buildings, heritage sites, sheltered housing, Sure Start centres, health and social care facilities, homeless shelters and many more – a total of almost 130 sites around the city. At the time Wavenet* took on the project, Wi-Fi was only available in a few larger libraries.

At a glance

Industry: Government/Charities

Sites: 130

Employees: 10,001+

Objectives:

- Harness the benefits of ultrafast broadband in order to benefit citizens
- Offer free, high-quality Wi-Fi in public places
- Bring internet access within easy reach of previously excluded groups and communities

Solutions:

- Wi-Fi

Products:

- Engage

Results:

- More than 100,000 unique users
- Core platform functions with 100% reliability across more than 400 access points
- Free and seamless connectivity to more than a million citizens

*The initial engagement was with Daisy, acquired by Wavenet in 2024.

The existing infrastructure lacked the necessary scalability to support further development, while the user interface varied across locations, offering little scope to capture and understand user data or improve their experience. This meant that a comprehensive redesign was required.

Time proved to be another critical factor. In order to meet eligibility requirements for a vital tranche of funding, working Wi-Fi had to be delivered to all 130 sites within a short three month period.

The Solution

Wavenet's state-of-the-art solution was based on a proven, resilient and scalable Cisco infrastructure housed in two separate data centres. Where possible, existing infrastructure was integrated into the design to provide fast, consistent and reliable Wi-Fi coverage across all sites.

The team designed a single proprietary portal, delivered via the Wavenet Engage Platform, to work across all locations, carrying the council's Busy Bee brand and greeting returning users with a "welcome back" page that remembers them by name and invites them to reconnect without the laborious process of entering usernames and passwords.

To ensure the project's exacting timescales could be met, the surveying of each Wi-Fi location was carried out in parallel with the ordering of hardware, cabling and other equipment – an approach that needed careful coordination and oversight. When lead times for installing some ASDL cabling proved too long, Wavenet made innovative use of 4G technology to provide high-quality interim connectivity and meet the completion deadline.

The Result

Greater Manchester's public Wi-Fi infrastructure has enjoyed a steady increase in usage, celebrating its 100,000th unique user in June 2017 and achieving more than a million logins. Meanwhile, the core platform has functioned with 100% reliability across more than 400 access points.

Most importantly, the project has enabled Manchester City Council to offer free and seamless internet connectivity to more than a million citizens, including underprivileged sections of the community who may previously have lacked internet access. This has helped to promote digital inclusion whilst encouraging the widespread development of IT skills.

Wavenet's Engage solution has added further value by offering the Council a bundled price for all services. This includes a sophisticated range of analytics that provides insight into every user interaction, capturing a variety of data from names, postcodes and email addresses to the time spent online and the site at which the Wi-Fi was accessed. This gives the Council an unprecedented understanding of user needs and habits, highlighting locations or time periods when usage is especially high and allowing it to provide the best possible service to each and every user. It also facilitates planning for the future stages in Greater Manchester's digital transformation.

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