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- Chris Groman, CIO, Fresh Encounter, Inc.

Highlights

- The company's PCI compliance profile was recently elevated from Level 3 to Level 2 requiring additional effort to meet compliance standards.
- PCI compliance required a four-day road trip every quarter to manually scan networks in 30 stores across Ohio and Indiana.
- Quarterly PCI compliance scanning did not ensure round-the-clock security.
- Providing on-site IT support for 30 widely distributed stores with a growing list of networking, PCI compliance, and Wi-Fi needs was not a viable option

Mojo Networks automates PCI compliance and provides centralized cloud-based management for family-run supermarket chains

Fresh Encounter, Inc. opened for business in 1995, when Mike Needler and his family purchased the Ohio-based retail grocery chain CWC Companies. In 1998, the company expanded dramatically with the acquisition of Fulmer Supermarkets, another retail grocery chain founded over 100 years ago in 1909. Today, the company operates 30 supermarkets throughout Ohio and eastern Indiana. In addition to its Great Scot, Community Markets, and Sack & Save chain store brands, the company also owns and operates several subsidiaries, Continental Distributing, Progressive Refrigeration, and Apple A Day Health Supplements which service the local food industry as well as the company's own grocery stores.

"We see ourselves as a solution for the smaller community," said Fresh Encounter CIO Chris Groman. "We don't have to compete with the big box stores. Instead we provide small to medium size community-friendly supermarkets that cater to small towns and their local needs."

The small community atmosphere is prevalent at all store locations and at the company's headquarters in Findlay, Ohio. The company buys a lot of locally grown melons, corn, tomatoes and other produce, and skilled meat cutters in every store provide a wide variety of custom cuts for individual customers.

"Local community involvement is a hallmark of our identity and we continually provide contributions and support for charitable causes," said Groman. "We provide hot dogs for homecoming games and also hold an annual charity golf outing to support needy families in our area. We are especially proud of the large greenhouse we built here in Findlay where we not only grow some of our produce but also open it up as a free community garden so people on public assistance programs can grow their own healthy food."

Operating as a widely-distributed enterprise across numerous small towns and rural areas did pose some networking challenges for Groman who has been with Fresh Encounter since June 2006. "I was hired to bring new technologies to the company," he said. "When I started there was no network. The company relied instead on FAX machines to transmit over 100 paper forms from the remote stores to headquarters where someone had to manually transcribe them into a computer." Back then, one of the biggest challenges was keeping up with the overworked FAX machine because it ran out of paper so frequently. But today the stores connect to the company headquarters over the Internet using local high speed broadband providers at each location with secure VPN tunneling. "It's a lot less expensive than using dedicated T1 lines and it works very well for our needs," said Groman.

The company uses four VLANs to separate different functions operating within the in-store networks. The VLANs are used for company-owned equipment, the point-of-sale (POS) systems which have their own servers in each store, outside vendor systems such as ATM machines and DVD rental kiosks, and third party in-store pharmacies.

Two years ago, Fresh Encounter purchased Mojo AirTight, the wireless intrusion prevention system (WIPS) solution, to help it meet increasing PCI wireless compliance requirements. "Our sales growth and payment card transaction volume took us from PCI Compliance Level 3 to Compliance Level 2 which resulted in increased levels of wireless scanning and reporting that we had to do," Groman said. "Originally I considered visiting each location and manually auditing our network by myself using an open source wireless scanning tool on a laptop computer. I also considered hiring and training a full-time technician to do it for me. Fortunately, during an ISA conference I was referred to Mojo Networks. After checking into it, I realized it was a much better and more cost-effective solution for PCI compliance."

Instead of Groman traveling extensively throughout Ohio and Indiana and getting only four scans for each store per year, the Mojo solution automatically protects all of his company's stores and VLANs year round, 24x7. Groman receives richly detailed PCI compliance reports directly on his laptop both on demand and on a regular schedule via email. This full-time solution far exceeds all of the company's PCI requirements yet it costs considerably less than manually performing audits once per quarter.

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Fresh Encounter has three Mojo access points operating at the company's headquarters and uses one or two Mojo C-50 single-radio or C-55 dual-radio devices in each store. Installation is simply a matter of plugging the Mojo device into the store's local area network. No additional configuration is required at the store location. Once online, the devices automatically connect to the Mojo server over the Internet where Groman can manage all of their settings and security policies using the cloud-based Mojo Wireless Manager. By using Mojo Networks' cloud services, Fresh Encounter does not have to invest in controllers or servers, and Groman can manage the entire system remotely from anywhere using his laptop computer. To Groman, this is perhaps the greatest benefit because it eliminates the need to take an exhausting four-day road trip every quarter to check each store for PCI compliance.

Groman appreciates the thoroughness of the Mojo Wireless Manager with its centralized management, ability to quarantine rogue devices automatically, and its many informational dashboards. "My normal daily routine is to log into the system and check on each store to make sure they are not having issues," he said.

Most of the issues he does see on the screen are related to temporary dropouts when the Internet service at a store goes down. Thankfully the Mojo sensors operate autonomously and continue to protect the network even if the connection to the management server is interrupted. "It's reassuring to know that if this happens, all security related data will still be collected and then synchronized with the server automatically when service is restored," said Groman.

Although he currently does not provide guest Wi-Fi services, Groman does use Mojo Networks' Wi-Fi at company headquarters and for specialized applications at various stores. One innovation uses Wi-Fi enabled grocer scales outdoors to transmit data from food stands in the parking lot to the indoor POS system. "The scales are very sophisticated. In addition to weights, they can provide recipe and ingredient information for bakeries as well as pricing and even allergen information for consumers." When used outdoors, Mojo Wi-Fi makes more sense since we cannot provide hard-wired connections to every scale."

Today Groman and his team provide IT and networking services for all Fresh Encounter stores, the company's headquarters, and its subsidiary companies. He continues to explore the many advanced features of his Mojo Wireless system and hopes to train additional users on PCI compliance. As for Fresh Encounter, they are preparing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their first acquisition, the CWC store chain, which was founded in 1964.

Benefits

- Automated 24x7 WIPS protection that greatly exceeds basic PCI compliance requirements at a much lower cost.
- Ability to conduct and manage PCI scanning and Wi-Fi access for all stores from a single location using Mojo Wireless Manager.
- Remote access and automation that eliminates the need for extra standing and quarterly four-day road trips for IT support and PCI compliance.

Want to learn more about Mojo?

Request a [personalized demo here](#) or call us at +1 (877) 930-6394