

McDonald's serves customers with fast, easy wifi



McDonald's is one of the world's best-known brands. So when it introduced free wifi for the millions of customers it serves every day, it needed a service – and the underlying WAN to support it – that would match the customer experience that is known from Benson to Beijing.

Doug Baker is the IT Services Manager for McDonald's. It's his job to keep the IT and telecommunications connected and working in more than 1200 restaurants across the UK.

One of his first objectives when he joined in 2010 was to supervise the switch of the public wifi service in all the restaurants to a new provider. McDonald's chose O₂ Wifi.

"We were looking for a partner to manage the end-to-end experience," he says. "We wanted a provider that would give us the whole managed service, from our data centre, through the WAN, out to the restaurants and ultimately to the customer."

"We needed a network that could support a constant, seven-day-a-week, 365-days-a-year business. Especially as well over half of our restaurants are open 24 hours a day."

A consistent customer experience

McDonald's is a perfect example of where IT supports the business mission. Customers get an easy, consistent experience no matter when or where they visit a McDonald's restaurant. The wifi provided by McDonald's has to match that experience, to maintain the integrity of the brand.

"When you go into any kind of café culture coffee shop, you don't just see everyone sitting at laptops anymore," says Doug Baker. "What you see is lots of people with tablets and smartphones, a multitude of different devices."

"And wifi is not just important for connecting to email, but for the many ways people connect to the outside world. They expect to have their social networks available to them all the time."

"So if we are going to offer wifi as part of the McDonald's customer experience, it has to meet that expectation in every restaurant. It has to make it quick and easy for customers to connect, no matter what device they might be using."



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One-time registration

O₂ Wifi gave McDonald's the speed and simplicity it needed for its public wifi service. Customers who have already registered to use O₂ Wifi prior to entering a McDonald's simply connect automatically when in a restaurant. After that, they can automatically connect without any usernames or passwords. The service is free for the end customer whether they are O₂ customers or not. And for a business like McDonald's, which has high volumes of repeat customers, it's a valuable additional service. It helps to keep customers loyal, because it's consistent with the kind of experience they have to come to expect from McDonald's. It gives them another reason to visit.

Says Doug Baker: "For many of our customers, the welcome page we present when they browse the web is the only real chance they get to interact with us, beyond ordering their food. It's a chance for us to communicate our ethics and our values – to show them another side of McDonald's. We can also use it to support any promotions and campaigns we are running."

Managed from end to end

Switching to O₂ Wifi needed to happen with as little disruption as possible to the routine of the restaurants. In the end, the entire migration of 1200 restaurants happened within just 90 days.

This included replacing all the lines at each restaurant, taking out the existing routers and installing two new routers, to provide redundancy and resilience. Each restaurant now has a dedicated line determined by the capacity requirements of each restaurant, coupled with a back-up 3G solution.

"It was very clear to us that we needed robust redundancy and resiliency," says Doug Baker. "The demand on our network and our communication now is far more than it's ever been before."

O₂ also provides a support desk that manages all the services around the McDonald's network, as well as the wifi and the network inside the restaurants. The support team proactively monitors the network and deals directly with the restaurant in the event of any incident.

"It's good that it's the O₂ team who are the first people to pick up any issues, rather than me," says Doug Baker. "Anyone in my job knows that if people aren't talking to you about your network, that's a good thing."

"All the change management and development services we need are also provided by O₂," he adds. "If I have new requirements, or I want to make a change to some of my configuration, they have the capability to do it for me."

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Safe wifi

McDonald's customers come from almost any demographic – from very young children to senior citizens. But families are a key group, which places a significant additional demand on the wifi service.

"We were the first company to be signed off by Mumsnet as being wifi friendly," says Doug Baker. "We have strong content filtering in place with O₂ Wifi. It gives us the ability to block inappropriate content, but it's also very flexible."

"If acceptable content is blocked for some reason, customers can tell us and we can modify the filters. It's an important part of the customer experience for the families who visit our restaurants."

Meeting customer expectations

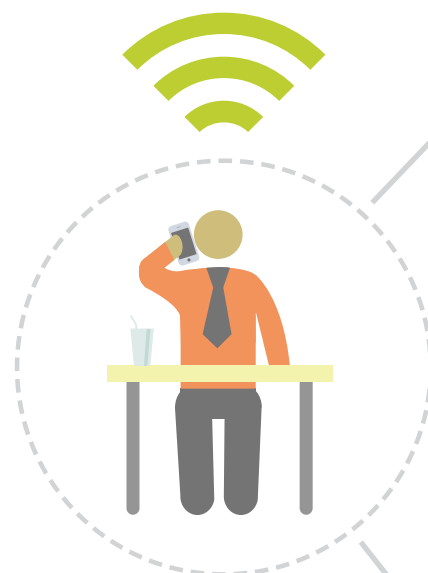
If any organisation could be said to understand its customers' expectations, it's McDonald's. A step back in time to the first McDonald's to open in the UK – 13 November 1974, if you're wondering – would show you a very different customer experience in many ways to the one you find today.

Yet McDonald's has succeeded in evolving its brand and its experience in line with the shifts in customer expectations that have unfolded in the last 40 years. It's a masterclass in brand development and, in recent years, the introduction of public wifi has been a key part of it.

As Doug Baker says: "IT is there to support the brand and operations. The free wifi we offer, and the connection we have into our restaurants that allows the free wifi, has to be managed properly, and it has to be delivered in the right way."

"O₂ Wifi has given us the flexibility and strong foundation we need to deliver the kind of wifi service customers expect from McDonald's."

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We'd love to hear from you. To find out more about how O₂ can help your business, just contact your Account Manager or call Matt Worth on 01235 433 507.

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