

# Network Computing

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For IT By IT

## ROLLOUTS

### AirWave Wireless Management Suite 5.0

AirWave's latest management suite supports multiple platforms and diverse technologies while providing value missing from native support tools. BY LEE BADMAN



The administration of multiple wireless management systems is a true burden that gets worse as networks grow. But WLAN management doesn't have to be a disjointed, frustrating mess. AirWave's latest offering in multivendor, multi-technology wireless management, Wireless Management Suite 5.0, provides a feature-rich, one-stop framework for overseeing heterogeneous and single-vendor WLANs.

AirWave customers will welcome the slew of new capabilities delivered with 5.0, while those new to the product will likely wonder how they did without it on networks with mixed hardware.

#### Not Just 802.11 Any More

AirWave's rollout answers a lot of questions about system management that WLAN managers may not have asked--yet. With early-stage support for WiMax and mesh devices that will grow with future releases, AirWave adds a degree of future-proofing for those shopping for a wireless management package. Moving to 802.1X for wireless user authentication? New "Universal Device Support" enables basic monitoring capabilities for RADIUS servers, authentication and encryption gateways, LAN switches, and other infrastructure devices. Even radio support

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for 4.9-GHz devices (a band reserved for public safety) is included. On the down side, AirWave's mantra of being vendor-agnostic rings a bit false, considering that products from Meru Networks and Trapeze Networks are not supported (but such support is on the road map). AirWave does support products from Aruba Networks, Cisco Systems, Colubris Networks, Proxim Wireless, Symbol Technologies, 3Com and several others from its server-based, Web-accessible console.

Better scaling--to more than 2,000 APs and controllers from

a single 5.0 server--is now possible, with multiple servers monitored from the AirWave Master Console. This version also provides granular, customizable device "compliance audits" to alert admins to misconfigured devices, and improved device and client mapping in site maps and floor plans.

#### Quick Setup, A Few Hiccups

We tested a beta version of Wireless Management Suite. Although it quickly loaded in our Syracuse University Real-World Labs®, where we managed test boxes and had views into the university's 900-AP Cisco WLAN, we hit a couple of snags that reflect the magnitude of the challenge of monitoring dissimilar wireless systems.

After adding a Cisco Wireless LAN Solution Engine (WLSE) to AirWave's list of devices to be monitored, for example, only a fraction of the APs managed by that WLSE were discovered. The devices not found through the WLSE were discovered in SNMP, so the problem was short-lived. Likewise, adding a RADIUS server for a Cisco WiSM controller precipitated strange feedback. These problems should be fixed by the time the product ships.

Regardless of these stumbles, it didn't take long to add a mix

#### WIRELESS NETWORK MANAGEMENT FEATURES

|  | AirWave 5.0 | Cisco WCS |
|--|-------------|-----------|
| Support for heterogeneous WLAN product sets    | ●           | ○         |
| Basic monitoring of non-WLAN network hardware  | ●           | ○         |
| Schedule configuration jobs                    | ●           | ○         |
| Robust device inventory reports                | ●           | ○         |
| Autoscaling of floor plans for RF maps         | ○           | ●         |
| View device configs in real time using console | ●           | ○         |
| ●=Yes ○=No                                     |             |           |

AirWave Wireless Management Suite 5.0 is well-suited to managing a heterogeneous WLAN environment.

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of wireless and related hardware from different vendors to the management view with SNMP and a variety of network scans, including wireless controllers, wireless bridges, wireless mesh nodes, PoE-capable Ethernet switches, and authentication components.

## The Payoff

The true value of a wireless-management system is measured by the ability to show the entire wireless network from one smooth interface, and the capacity to handle common admin tasks, such as device configuration changes, reporting, and troubleshooting, in an intuitive interface. Role-based access permissions are also important, so helpdesk staff can see the wireless world without inadvertently doing configuration damage.

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The Wireless Management Suite is far better suited for these tasks than one of its primary competitors--Cisco's Wireless Control System (WCS). AirWave provides device configuration scheduling, for example, but the current version of WCS has none. WCS requires you to use a controller's CLI to access config information, while AirWave not only extracts the controller's configuration, it provides the option to make it an exportable report. AirWave's smooth, snappy GUI and well-rounded feature set are more mature than those of WCS. AirWave can even manage both WCS and WLSE and connected devices, including Cisco's mesh nodes, along with WLAN, mesh and autonomous APs from many other vendors--Cisco's WCS doesn't even integrate with its own WLSE.

Modern WLAN management systems feature a visual component for showing floor plans and outdoor images with APs and active clients displayed. AirWave's Visual RF module is adequate, but not that much better than Cisco's Wireless Control Center or Ekahau's Site Survey. Those who use 5.0 instead of competing products won't lose functionality, but each utility in

## the upshot

**CLAIM:** AirWave's Wireless Management Suite 5.0 seeks to be top dog in wireless management by supporting multiple platforms and diverse technologies, including WLAN, mesh, and Wi-Max, while providing value missing from native support tools.

**CONTEXT:** WLAN admins, especially those supporting diverse product sets, require robust management tools that aren't always supplied by their WLAN product vendor. AirWave has taken the lead in meeting a need in an area in which WLAN vendors often fall short.

**CREDIBILITY:** Clearly better than its obvious competitors at most tasks, Wireless Management Suite could be improved by supporting more lightweight systems and providing greater flexibility in task scheduling and map creation.

this space does things a bit differently. When AirWave's Visual RF scales a given map, for instance, the onus is on the user to know the dimensions of the building and requires input of building width and length. In Ekahau's and Cisco's products, maps of unknown dimension can be scaled with common references, such as a three-foot doorway. This may seem minor, but getting accurate dimensions of a large building can be difficult. Regardless, AirWave did a nice job showing WLAN APs and a small mesh made of Cisco 1500s, along with associated clients and detected rogues, in picture form.

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