



Interconnected retail on a massive scale

The Home Depot leverages HPE GreenLake for Networking to integrate in-store and online shopping for seamless customer experiences



Customer: The Home Depot

Industry: Retail

Country: United States

Millions started home improvement projects during the pandemic, creating a huge surge in sales at The Home Depot — both online and in person. Because of its strategic investment in secure connectivity, the retailer was able to accelerate and drive unprecedented growth during a time of great uncertainty. Now, with the power to reach farther and do more at the edge, customers are reaping the benefits — from frictionless shopping to enhanced connectivity and seamless curbside pickup.

Big retail, big changes

Warehouse-style shopping has a lot going for it. With an intoxicating wealth of goods and services under one roof, there's more than enough to spark the imagination and inspire new projects.

But finding the right product in a store twice the size of a football field can be overwhelming. It's something leaders at The Home Depot understand all too well. With more than 50,000 unique products in each store and millions available online, customers needed a seamless way to navigate the sheer volume of choices to make it easier to find what they need.

Several years ago, the retail giant launched an initiative — One Home Depot — to merge the online and in-store shopping experiences. "Customer expectations are changing at an all-time fast pace," says Daniel Grider, Vice President of Technology for The Home Depot. "What is their expectation? Where do they want to shop? How do they want to shop? We knew we needed to invest in those priorities to improve customer experiences."

Vision

Integrate online and in-store shopping experiences to reduce friction and set the stage for growth

Strategy

Build an agile, flexible in-store network architecture to make it easier to shop — and work — at The Home Depot

Outcomes

- Extends wireless coverage up to 15x outside retail stores (20 feet vs. 100 yards)
- Helps remove friction from the customer experience by integrating online and in-store experiences
- Provides the agility to scale quickly to significantly expand in-store technology solutions

"We're not just talking about extending wireless 15–20 feet in front of the store. We're extending coverage 100 yards. That's a game changing amount of connectivity."

– Daniel Grider, Vice President of Technology, The Home Depot



Prepared for the unexpected

Then the pandemic happened. With the entire world's population suddenly spending unprecedented amounts of time in their own homes, it's no wonder people wanted to make those spaces more comfortable, personal, and efficient.

The Home Depot was ready to help. "We have a culture of just doing the right thing. We've been through natural disasters, both internally at our stores or around the country. So, our teams are used to giving their all," Grider says. "We were well positioned because of the foundation for innovation that supports our teams. The pandemic accelerated a lot of the work and investments we were already planning."

But things were changing even before the pandemic. "Online sales were already growing at a dramatic pace," Grider recalls. "And we had in-store sales that were continuing to grow, but the experiences didn't always align to meet the customer's needs."

A relentless pursuit of better

Uniting the in-store and online experiences wouldn't be easy, but things were changing fast. "We call online the 'front door' to our stores now," Grider says. "What that means for us is that half of the people that place orders online prefer to pick their product up inside our store. They don't want us to deliver to them.

So, we know how important it is to have the same experience everywhere — from browsing online at home to the moment they step in our store. It's got to be the same."

For The Home Depot to not just keep its doors open, but thrive during a time of great uncertainty, it meant a heightened focus on experiences at its 2,300 stores. "We have a relentless desire to remove friction for our customers and their shopping experience," Grider says. "And the One Home Depot initiative was the key to getting it right."

Improving outcomes at the edge

Making it happen would mean massive improvements in the quantity and quality of networking in and around its retail locations.

With each store comprising 100,000 square feet of interior retail space, making improvements at the edge was going to be a complex undertaking. But it didn't stop there. The Home Depot wanted to extend the connectivity around its stores to encompass the parking areas as well.

"I think flexibility is what customers want," Grider relates. "It's whenever, however they want to shop, and we have to meet them there. Whether they're shopping outside in the garden center or at one of our seasonal lots, we want them to be connected."



The freedom to scale, the power to do more

The solution comprises HPE Aruba Networking wireless access points managed through HPE Aruba Networking Central cloud with AIOps capabilities for proactive network health and security profile monitoring. Wireless technology includes HPE Aruba Networking Location Services via WLAN access points.

Foundational decisions

The Home Depot knew the kind of scale necessary to roll this out would be enormous. “We looked at what it would take and the upfront investment to make it happen,” Grider recalls. “And then we looked out five years and assessed the cost to refresh it all and we knew we needed a different approach.”

Aside from the cost, Grider also wanted to take complexity out of deployments and ongoing management of the solution. “For us, it’s about simplifying the manageability of it — simplifying the developers’ interaction with those platforms and the compute.”

The Home Depot chose to build its initiative on HPE Aruba Networking’s Edge Services Platform (ESP) delivered through HPE GreenLake for Networking — a network-as-a-service solution that enables Grider and team to deploy resources in a flexible consumption and subscription-based model.

“HPE GreenLake for Networking not only creates pervasive wireless coverage in each store, but simplifies the management and deployment of new systems moving forward,” Grider says.

And most importantly, it’s a network that makes it easier to shop — and work — at The Home Depot.

“We are a warehouse environment. If you think about our retail space, it is high racking, a lot of product. So, it’s a challenge to move around and continue to get that coverage,” Grider relates. “One of the most exciting things about HPE GreenLake for Networking is the scale of the wireless coverage we can achieve.”

The new network also paved the way for The Home Depot to custom design new hand-held devices for sales associates. “We worked with Zebra Technologies to build a phone that takes advantage of all of the technologies in the Aruba access points,” Grider explains. “Now we feel like we’ve really put something into the hands of our associates that empowers them to help customers and help themselves.”



Agility when it counts most

It's an investment that has unlocked new levels of business agility for The Home Depot. "HPE GreenLake for Networking really gives us the ability to pivot extremely quickly and deliver new solutions as they're needed," Grider says.

During the earliest days of the pandemic, local governments began mandating curbside pickup options for retailers. Because The Home Depot was classified as an essential business, it found itself needing to rapidly scale its outdoor networking capabilities.

"We didn't have a big curbside presence before, but once the demand changed, we knew we had the foundation to be able to pivot toward that," Grider explains. "We're not just talking about extending wireless 15–20 feet in front of the store. We're extending coverage 100 yards. That's a game changing amount of connectivity."

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A helping hand on the customer journey

Another benefit of the solution: it is supported and managed by HPE GreenLake for Networking. "We trust the people that make the product to roll it out, support it, and manage the day-to-day analytics," Grider explains.

"It takes the decision-making burden off of our technology and engineering resources, so they can focus on more strategic business value drivers."

It gives Grider and team not just the ability to do more, but peace of mind as well. "HPE GreenLake for Networking has really been critical for us to understand what's going on in our stores from the health, the monitoring, the well-being of all the wireless connectivity."

And if the connectivity is there, The Home Depot is one step closer to making good on its promise of frictionless and interconnected retail experiences. "We talk about the customer journey. We're on the ride with them," Grider says. "They're in the driver's seat of where they want to go and how they want to get there. It's up to us to meet them on that journey with the expectations that they deserve and need."





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– **Daniel Grider**, Vice President of Technology, The Home Depot

Solution

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