

CHURCH IT TEAM CREATES MOBILE CHECK-IN SYSTEM FOR FELLOWSHIPONE

McLean Bible Church creates a unique, consolidated, mobile solution to streamline check-in, even without Internet access.



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INTRODUCTION

McLean Bible Church is a multi-site church in the Washington D.C. area. They currently run nine campuses, a “spiritual beltway” around the city, with the vision to make an impact on secular Washington, DC with the message of Jesus Christ.

The Challenge

McLean had opened a new campus that met in a music center and so had to completely set up and tear down each Sunday. They wanted a solution for their Fellowship One check-in stations that would be easy to set up and tear down, while at the same time having minimal points of potential failure. You can see a video of their setup at <https://vimeo.com/19115185>.

The Solution 1.0

They initially looked at all-in-one desktops with touch screens, but felt that it didn't flow well with the building they were in. Matt Pugh, Sr. Application Analyst at the time, explained: “The use of iPads had intrigued us for some time, but the truth is, as much as I love the iPad, the back side of the set up was too complicated and came with too many points of failure. Then we read about the Dell Inspiron Duo. It's a tablet and netbook all in one.”

From there, the guys at McLean created what they call Check-in a Box as their mobile solution for checking kids into Sunday school. Their Check-in a Box contains:

- + 4 Dell Inspiron Duos (with most pre-installed apps stripped off for smoother performance)
- + Intel N550 Dual Core, 1.5GHz, 2 x 512K L2 Cache
- + 2GB,DDR3,1333MHz, Runs at 800MHz
- + 10.1 in W 16:9 RGBW HD, Multi-touch, 1.3M Webcam (1366 x 768)
- + 320G, 2.5inch, 7200RPM SA TA Hard Drive
- + Windows 7 Home Premium
- + 29WHr Lithium-Ion Battery (4-cell)
- + 4 Zebra TLP 2884-Z Label Printers
- + Zebra PS4000 Wireless Print Server
- + Belkin Wireless Router

The PS4000 was easy to come by, but the management port cable (Serial to RJ45, apparently a very specific type BL17502-2) wasn't easy to find. They ended up finding the cable at Barcodediscount.com (Item: Zebra AK18350-1 Cable Kit for PS4000, DNLD Shield, DB-9). Once the correct cable was obtained, the server was very easy to set up. Each Duo is mapped to all 4 printers, with each tablet having a different default. The printers have the same IP address, but with different ports (all of which are tweakable via the console port software for the server). Matt said it was awesome for the team to see one of their BIG ideas come to reality. "It was a lot of work, but well worth it. We're so pleased to introduce Check-in a Box."

New CHALLENGE, SOLUTION 2.0

A short time later, they found out that the new campus was going to meet at a different location. This wasn't alarming because everything is meant to be set up and torn down every Sunday. Then they discovered that there would be no network drops available to plug-in Check-in a Box. The team put their heads together again and came up with a solution... Check-in a Box 2.0. In reality, Matt says all they did was switch out the wireless router and add a MiFi card. The difference is that the new router wowed them. The MBR1200 – Failsafe Gigabit N Router for Mobile Broadband works like a normal wireless router, but can connect to a 3G or 4G mobile device. Check out the product page here. The router has a very impressive web interface where you can adjust any aspect of the device that you want. It also accepts a plethora of mobile broadband devices (tethering phones, USB dongles, and PCI cards). Another nice feature was that after plugging the router in, it said, "Good Morning Michael"—a nod to Kitt, the "smart car" in the television series Knight Rider. When running check-in on all 4 Duos across the MiFi, there was some substantial slowness, but it worked. For a long-term solution, connecting a 4G unit would answer that problem. "Either way, it's a great way to run check-in when you have no network drops available. Can you say outside at a sports camp?" Matt said.

A WORD OF CAUTION ABOUT 4G

The team learned that broadcasting a Wifi signal interferes with receiving a 4G signal. To keep the router from rebooting when the signal drops, extend your 4g device away from your Wifi broadcasting router by at least 5 feet with a USB extension cable.

SUCCESS STORY

McLean Bible relies heavily on fellowship one's Check-in application for keeping track of attendance and volunteers. By creating this mobile solution, they opened the door for other uses that a standard set-up could not afford. At one particular campus, mobile checkin transformed from impossible to a streamlined outdoor check-in process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of what has been done surrounding mobile check-in was based on McLean's unique needs. You will need to experiment with different setups to find out what works best for your situation.

You can see for yourself how McLean configured their setup by visiting the video links below.

<https://vimeo.com/19115185>

<https://vimeo.com/19773280>

