

CASE STUDY



OVERVIEW

Founded by Philip Fournier and Eric Durand-Gasselin in 1997, the Afone Group specializes in payment systems management, telecoms and security. Based in Angers and listed on the Euronext Paris stock exchange, Afone now has over 600,000 private, professional and corporate clients.

REQUIREMENTS

- Provide free broadband Internet access in high-density areas
- Must be an Internet access provider
- SSIT linearity
- Increase network density
- Provide maximum user-friendliness

SOLUTION

- Deployed 4,000 ZoneFlex R500 access points in central locations among the top 20 cities in France

BENEFITS

- Coverage of the hyper-centre of the 20 largest cities in France
- Users signing up in Angers will have automatic and completely transparent access to the network when they are in Marseille, Mulhouse, Nice or Paris
- Extremely low failure rate
- Powerful signal range
- Deployed 4,000 ZoneFlex R500 access points



AFONE RUNS WIFILIB PROJECT TO DIGITIZE CITIES OF FRANCE

Cities all over the world are becoming digital—bringing people together to dream, create and innovate in new ways. Digitalization is forcing cities and business to reimagine their business models—and there has never been a better time to make cities smarter. With the explosion of the Internet, the future of mobile networks may not necessarily be with 4G and 5G over fiber, but with Wi-Fi. The Afone Group, a virtual operator based in Angers, France has launched a project called Wifilib—meaning free Wi-Fi as a continuous network in cities targeting the busiest areas.

Founded by Philip Fournier and Eric Durand-Gasselin in 1997, the Afone Group is a telecoms and electronic payments operator with an annual turnover of 50 million euros and is listed on the Euronext Paris stock exchange. The Group is structured around four areas of expertise: telecoms, digital communications, electronic payments and remote surveillance. These four activities all share the same base: telecoms. The Group has over 600,000 private, professional and corporate clients.

CHALLENGE

When 4G was introduced in 2013, Afone faced a major challenge, it needed to address the issue of increasing density and still provide free broadband Internet access in all of these areas. Data consumption continues to increase and mobile users no longer use their phones just for making calls, but as a completely separate communication tool. The Afone Group quickly realized that usage areas were no longer restricted to the home and office, but extended all throughout our communities as well. This made it vital to roll out Internet access across all of these areas.

"Existing systems were limited in terms of local mobility and equipment," says Afone's Innovation Director, Reynald Werquin. "These days, nearly all phones are a hybrid of a phone and a tablet. Equipment is becoming increasingly powerful and there is a very strong increase in data usage. People are viewing a lot more videos and photos every day and according to a study by Forrester, people check their smartphones an average of 42 times a day."

Users now want to have broadband access on the move, but they don't want to pay any more for it. Wi-Fi's popularity has increased greatly, making it more complex because access areas were always restricted in size. To answer the challenges, Afone needed to find a way to increase network density while taking three major issues into consideration:

1. How do you provide coverage for mobile zones with small cells as opposed to 3G and 4G?
2. How do you provide high-quality broadband Internet access for users?
3. How do you build an economic model based on a free system and offering free access?



"Providing free broadband Internet access will improve the wireless experience for everyone. This would not have been possible without Ruckus Wireless."

REYNALD WERQUIN
Innovation Director, Afone



SOLUTION

A number of wireless infrastructure providers were benchmarked on the basis of these issues and Afone was looking to affirm its position as an Internet provider. Afone turned to our partner Config for guidance. After looking at several other suppliers, Ruckus stood out for its wide coverage capabilities, innovative design and wealth of experience.

"We had our first meeting with Ruckus Wireless in 2013 and they immediately inspired us with confidence, offering us a range of technical innovations and close sales support," states Werquin.

The first part of the project consisted of introducing a Wi-Fi network in areas where there are dense crowds of people, making tourists the number one target. When travellers arrive from abroad, the first thing they do is switch off their data subscription; however, this is actually the precise moment when they need it the most for accessing information such as maps and local amenities. Since the model of this project was based on a specific target audience, the concentration was at the busiest locations. With the deployment of 4,000 ZoneFlex R500 access points in central locations among the top twenty largest cities in France, the results were astounding. Unlike any other 802.11ac wireless solution in its class, the ZoneFlex R500 combines patented adaptive antenna technology and automatic interference mitigation to deliver consistent, predictable performance at extended ranges. The biggest advantage to the network now is that it is seamless. Users signing up in Angers will have automatic and completely transparent access to the network when they are in Marseille, Mulhouse, Nice or Paris.

"By providing us with a high-quality product with an extremely low failure rate and powerful signal range, Ruckus Wireless gave us everything we were looking for to run a successful project," comments Werquin.

As the sixth largest division of Paris with an average visitor rate of 5,000 people per day, partnerships have been developed with brands that see a benefit for themselves in the network, communicating and capitalizing on the existing network.

"We tender our services to any partner cities who ask us to," says Werquin.

The second part of the Afone project relates to connected devices. Reynald Werquin explains: "We can also provide the infrastructure to enrich Internet access with M2M (machine-to-machine) information. For example, a sonometer positioned on an access point can deliver technical information about powerful noise disturbances. We can capitalize on this information by approaching equipment manufacturers based in the area and asking them to respond as a consequence to ensure that they are respectful of noise levels."

The third aspect is in regards to the data. The WifiLib network delivers seamless connectivity, making it possible to enrich information, which can then be tailored to users for geo-targeting based on data personalization and the location of the user. The idea behind the WifiLib project is to provide all of the additional service benefits for maximum user-friendliness, without intruding too much into people's lives.

Ruckus Wireless built the core of the Afone Group network for its WifiLib project. Its work encompasses all aspects of the infrastructure under a collaborative partnership with Afone Group departments. When Ruckus Wireless launches a next generation of terminals or carries out technical upgrades to its access points (APs), these will automatically be incorporated into existing WifiLib network infrastructure.

"Providing free broadband Internet access will improve the wireless experience for everyone. This would not have been possible without Ruckus Wireless," concludes Werquin.