



VERTICAL:	Retail
HEAD OFFICE:	United States
LOCATIONS:	101 Locations
DATA CENTRE:	United States

Brake Masters Puts the Brakes on Outages Across 71 Sites with Cato

About Brake Masters

Brake Masters is an auto repair chain in the western United States with 71 company-owned retail stores and 30 franchises. Before migrating to Cato, the company owned-stores, served by Brake Masters IT, had redundant firewall appliances connected by T1 lines and MPLS. All traffic was sent from the retail locations to a datacenter in Tucson, Arizona. The primary applications were point-of-sale (PoS) systems and retail customer Wi-Fi.

Outages Keep Business in Second Gear

Network connectivity is essential to any retail operation. Unreliable, slow network access can translate into lost revenue through credit card processing delays and lower customer satisfaction as guest Wi-Fi grinds to a halt.

Steve Waibel, Director of IT for Brake Masters, had been struggling with his legacy MPLS service. The MPLS network connected Brake Masters' 71 stores with T1 lines, carrying Point of Scale (PoS) system for credit card processing and the guest Wi-Fi for customers to pass the time while waiting to get their cars repaired back to the Brake Masters datacenter in Tucson, Arizona. But Waibel found that the MPLS to be "just plain unreliable" and slow, he says. "We faced weekly outages in one store or another," he says.

The network was also unable to deliver a decent guest Wi-Fi experience. The free Wi-Fi from Brake Masters was often limited to just 500 Kbits/s, far too slow for YouTube or to do much more than basic Web browsing.



“We got quite a few complaints about that,” Waibel says. And MPLS proved to be a drag on Brake Masters’ schedule for opening new stores. When a new store was ready to open, they were often waiting on connectivity. “We had an ongoing issue with provisioning MPLS,” Waibel says.

Cato Gets Brake Masters Cruising

Waibel knew he needed to fix his network and began researching SD-WAN vendors. “All totaled, we probably evaluated 10 to 12 SD-WAN vendors,” he says. But alternative SD-WAN solutions proved to be too expensive and complicated, requiring Brake Masters to maintain firewall appliances at every location. They also relied on the public Internet, which Waibel thought were going to be too unreliable and unpredictable for Brake Masters.

With Cato, Waibel found a solution that met his needs. Cato is the first implementation of Gartner’s secure access service edge (SASE) architecture and converges security and networking into a global, cloud-native platform. Sites, mobile users, and cloud-resources – all connect to the nearest PoP of Cato’s global private backbone, a geographically distributed, SLA-backed network of 50+ PoPs, interconnected by multiple tier-1 carriers. The backbone’s cloud-native software provides global routing optimization, self-healing capabilities, WAN optimization for maximum end-to-end throughput, and full encryption.

In the end, Waibel chose to deploy Cato across all 71 locations, configuring sites with a Cato Socket, Cato’s SD-WAN device, and dual last-mile Internet connections, typically cable and fixed wireless. “Currently, we’ve connected 55 locations and moving forward with converting the rest,” he says.

Brake Masters Deploy Sites Quickly and Improves Performance

Waibel says Cato meets all the needs for retail locations, including easy management, deployment, and getting notifications of potential network problems before they’re a big deal. “All that makes it very easy to run your retail establishments,” Waibel says. More specifically, opening new stores with Cato has been much faster and easier than with MPLS. “We order lines, and they’re always in well before the store is done,” Waibel says. With Cato, he also vastly improved his customer Wi-Fi experience.

“Since we moved to Cato, our bandwidth increased by approximately 30 times the speed we had before,” Waibel says. “Now, the customer’s Wi-Fi experience is much better. We’ve stopped receiving complaints since deploying Cato,” Waibel says.



The changes in the last mile infrastructure also meant better uptime.

“None of our sites have lost complete connectivity since deploying Cato,” he says, “Sure, there are disruptions in the last mile, but the Cato Socket just moves the traffic over the secondary connection. The users never know the difference,” Waibel says.

The portal makes it easy to set up a new site, manage a site, and manage firewall rules. “The management portal is well designed. It’s my favorite feature,” he says, “All the information you need to manage the network is right there.”

A case in point is his security infrastructure. Instead of deploying branch security appliances, Waibel relies on Cato security services – NGFW, anti-malware, and Cato IPS. He administers his security rules centrally in the Cato management portal, automatically applying them to the stores everywhere – all without deploying additional security appliances.

And when there are problems, Waibel has been able to resolve disruptions far faster with Cato. “We get a view of every single store, and we can tell if there’s a problem at any store,” Waibel says. “Every day, we know exactly what’s going on, and we can address any issues that might be there.”

New Network. Great Experience.

Instead of stores calling in with problems, Cato automatically notifies Waibel of connectivity issues.

“Often, we’re already on top of things when the store becomes aware of the issue,” he says. “With Cato, we’ve become very proactive. Compared to what we used for six years with MPLS, it’s like night and day. And I would never go back.”

“I would recommend Cato to other companies considering moving to SD-WAN,” says Waibel. “Opening new stores now goes smoothly, pricing is affordable, the cloud firewall and private backbone provide a great experience, and services are easy to set up,” he says.

Steve Waibel,
Director of IT

