

Halfords relies on AI Ops for retail transformation



Halfords, the UK's leading provider of motoring and cycling products and services, has reimagined its business, driving growth of commercial services and creating a unified, omnichannel retail experience.

The 125-year-old company has invested heavily in digital to accelerate the transformation. An AI-driven network from Juniper in its stores, garages, and offices serves as a flexible foundation for its growth and operational efficiency.

OVERVIEW

Company	Halfords
Industry	Retail
Products Used	AP33, EX2300, Wireless (Wi-Fi) Assurance, Wired Assurance
Region	EMEA

CUSTOMER SUCCESS AT-A-GLANCE

1400+

Garages, stores, and mobile vans

100%

Reduction in network-related trouble tickets

35%

Improvement in uptime

£1.39

Billion in revenues in 2022

CHALLENGE

Legacy LAN makes for a bumpy ride

Halfords pivoted during the pandemic, with strong growth in online sales and the addition of contactless tactics like click-and-collect in its parking lots. Its innovative mobile field service software, Avalyer, was critical to delivering 70,000 services safely and efficiently per week at its auto centers and customers' homes.

Many pandemic-motivated shopping behaviors are now permanent, and technology continues to be critical to improving the customer experience and driving growth at Halfords. Whether a customer is buying an electric bike, getting an oil change, or replacing worn tires, reliable Wi-Fi connectivity is essential for Halfords' workers and shoppers alike.

But aging in-store networks were increasingly a roadblock to sales and service.

"The network is a utility," says Neil Holden, CIO at Halfords. "The network is a big part of our digital transformation journey, and we needed a very intelligent, secure network with next-generation capabilities."



 **SOLUTION**

Set the course to a self-driving network

Halfords conducted an in-depth selection process for a modern network, including an extended trial in two locations where the retailer was piloting its store-of-the-future concept.

“Juniper was a disruptor in the industry,” says Holden. “I liked that.”

Halfords is deploying a Juniper wired and wireless network at its retail stores, auto centers, and offices. Mist AI™ and the Juniper Mist cloud architecture work in conjunction with Juniper wireless access points to deliver Wi-Fi 6 and virtual Bluetooth® LE services to Halfords’ staff and customer smartphones, point-of-sale devices, in-store video displays, and other connected devices. Juniper switches provide the high-performance access networks.

“The network user experience that Juniper offers far exceeds anything else in the market,” says Holden. “Juniper’s ease of operations and self-healing capabilities, along with the user experience metrics it provides, are outstanding.”

Mist AI helps network operators like Halfords optimize user experiences and simplify IT operations with automated network assurance and the proactive detection and resolution of problems. Users and devices have predictable connectivity, and network-related trouble tickets have dropped.

 **OUTCOME**

Destination: Smart Wi-Fi from store to shop floor

“We want to innovate, test and learn, and fail fast,” says Holden.

A Juniper AI-driven network provides that agile digital foundation for Halford’s continued success. It can create a more consistent and convenient customer experience across locations and channels, whether customers are stopping by for a free brake check, buying new tires, or shopping for a safe, fun kids bike. It can tailor communications with its Halford Motor Club members when they come to the store.

“We are enabling solution selling,” says Holden. “Our new system provides colleagues in the stores the necessary information about products like child seats, cycle racks, and roof racks, so they can have informed conversations with customers and sell with greater confidence.”

AI and automation enabled Halfords to connect up more than 200 auto centers in just 22 weeks when it acquired National Tire. The transformation continues, and the next step is adopting an AI-driven SD-WAN for reliable connectivity, Zero Trust security, and simplified IT operations for 1400 stores, auto centers, offices, and service vans.

“We’re piloting an AI-driven SD-WAN now, and we’re excited to implement it,” he says.



“Juniper networking is a game changer.”

Neil Holden
CIO, Halfords

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