NEWSLETTER

The 2026 Gartner MQ for Enterprise Wired & Wireless LAN dropped yesterday.

By **Keith Parsons, CWNE #3** · 2026-05-21 · originally on LinkedIn

Heres what actually changed, and what it means if you live in WLAN every day.

Let's compare changes from the last report honestly, then talk about what a WLAN professional might want to do with this information.

The headline moves (2025 → 2026):

- **HPE absorbed Juniper, and the combined entity is now top-right.** In the 2025 MQ, Juniper sat alone at the top of both axes on the strength of Mist AI, with HPE Aruba a step behind. In 2026, with the acquisition closed, Gartner places HPE as the single highest-execution / furthest-vision vendor. The implication is bigger than a dot on a chart: Aruba Central and Mist are now 'co-leaders'?
- **Cisco is back in the Leaders quadrant.** Practical read: if you held off on Catalyst Center / Meraki Dashboard unification because the strategy felt muddy, the messaging is finally coherent. Worth re-evaluating.
- **Arista jumped from Visionary to Leader.** This is the move that's going to surprise people who still think of Arista as "the data center company." They've built out Cognitive WiFi (originally Mojo), and a CloudVision-based campus story that's now credible at scale. Worth at least a POC if you're doing a refresh in 2026.
- **Fortinet appears to have slipped from Leader toward Visionary.** Fortinet's WLAN remains a strong fit if you're security-first (think retail, OT, branch-heavy environments), but it's no longer the obvious "and we get great Wi-Fi too" play.
- **Extreme is still in Visionary territory** Platform ONE is real, their fabric story remains differentiated for complex venues (stadiums, education, healthcare), and the customers I know who run Extreme love it. The MQ doesn't reflect that, but neither do most analyst tools.

- **Nile and Meter remain Visionaries**, still flying the NaaS flag. Demand for managed Wi-Fi-as-a-service is real but limited; if your org doesn't want to own the network, these are the names to short-list.

My take as a Wireless LAN professional:

Gartner is a snapshot from six months ago, heavily filtered through a vendor briefing process that rewards marketing as much as engineering. Use it as one input, not your ONLY input.

If I'm doing vendor evaluations this year, here's how the MQ changes my short-list:

1. **HPE/Aruba/Juniper/Mist is now the safe-but-not-boring choice.** It also concentrates risk, one fewer independent Leader to play vendors against in an RFP. If you were an Aruba shop, you probalby still are. If you were a Mist shop, nothing has changed.
2. **Cisco deserves another look** for shops that wrote them off during the 2024-2025 Catalyst/Meraki confusion.
3. **Arista belongs on greenfield short-lists now**, especially for DC-aligned enterprises.
4. **Fortinet stays on the list for security-first deployments**, but probably not for pure WLAN excellence.
5. **Extreme deserves more credit than the MQ gives them**, particularly for K-12, higher ed, stadiums, and complex L2 fabric requirements.
6. **NaaS (Nile/Meter)** is a real conversation for mid-market and lean IT teams, not yet for large enterprise.

The MQ doesn't move my opinion about who builds great Wi-Fi. There are many more metrics that matter more than a dot on a chart.

What did I miss?

Where's the MQ still wrong?

Always interested in how other WLAN folks are reading it.

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