

The right connections

A modern business needs strong communications to perform well. With hotels, these serve the business as well as customers. NME talks to the Radisson SAS Dubai about its latest network implementation.

Any hotel based in Dubai's Media City will have a high percentage of business clientele. And the business community is not going to be impressed with anything less than state of the art technology that gives them constant connectivity and access to communications.

Communication is the name of the game in the modern business world, both internally and customer-facing, and that was the main driver for the Radisson SAS to deploy Trapeze's Smart Mobile Technology across its towers.

If communication is the name of the game, then a modern hotel needs to make sure it is on top form.

Dinto Joseph, the Radisson's IT manager, saw VoIP as the winning move in the communication game for the organisation. "As we are strategically located in the heart of DIC, DMC and Knowledge Village in Dubai, our clientele are mostly business people, who need a secure and stable internet connection all the time. We understand that internet is a basic service that should be free to the end user and this makes the demand for internet vital," he asserts.

Internet by any means

The Radisson offers internet access to its guest in three modes - traditional dial-up, in-room high speed cable connection and wireless anywhere in the hotel. Joseph claims that retaining a dial-up connection is essential for enterprise travellers.

"We still offer dial-up so that customers can connect with their offices over an ordinary phone line; many hotels have stopped that service but it's still vital," he says.

But despite what free Wi-Fi access can do to inspire customer loyalty, a seamless wireless access network was not the

only driver for the Radisson. The project will also see a return on investment because of the changes it makes in how the staff communicates, according to Joseph.

"We had some challenges that needed to be overcome, mainly because of GSM communication, where we had grey areas in the back of the house and the basement which were not covered by GSM. So we had the problem of coverage and also the spending on the GSM to reach hotel staff," he says.

"The RoI for the hotel industry, for a service-orientated company like a hotel, is that we need to have reachability and stability in our communications. In terms of money, when we started using the wireless IP phones we started saving on GSM calls - we can definitely get our money back in three years," he adds.

The Radisson was keen to start reaping the benefits of the project from the very start, which was why the network was implemented in one month, with most of the implementation taking place while the towers were built.

"We did the installations in tower one initially and then we started installations in tower two, which were scheduled as part of the tower two opening. And mainly we focused on the guest areas for phases one and two and then for the third phase we are focusing mainly on the VoIP - that was our main goal to have proper communications in the hotel for the employees," states Joseph.

Convergence ahead

The new system operates on the hotel's converged Cisco network, which Joseph feels made the implementation easier because of the adaptability of the converged IT infrastructure.

"A converged network is more flexible - if you want to implement services in the future, it's ready to take new services. So if tomorrow



"We have achieved our primary goal to have voice over wireless."
Dinto Joseph, Radisson's IT manager

we wanted to implement TV over wireless, the system is already capable of handling it," he says.

It was when the hotel was shortlisting vendors for its converged network that Trapeze first came up as a possible choice.

"When we were looking at the converged network design, we went with Cisco, but Trapeze was on that list. We were looking at the amount of experience they had in the market and their existing clientele like other hotels in the region and a university in Sharjah. So we checked the existing clientele and obviously the product they were offering," Joseph says. "The access points they offer are quite convenient for a hotel because they match a hotel's interior, they look more like a smoke alarm. And they are using a Linux based platform which is more stable from a security point of view."

The implementation and integration of the wireless network was carried out by systems integrator EMW.

He adds that security and stability in the wireless network were key focus areas for the Radisson. The security for this network lies in Trapeze's built-in firewall system, which prevents rogue access points and network intrusion. Additional security is provided by the decision taken during the design phase to keep the administration and guest networks completely separate.

The network also uses separate VLANs on a floor level to keep the network traffic within

a limited range, so any attacks will be kept within these constrained segments.

No stopping

The Radisson clearly prides itself on aiming for the best with its technology. Apart from its high security standards, which comply with EU standards of communication, security and data retention, the hotel is one of the first in the region to be IPass-enabled. IPass is a worldwide system which gives the user a single account they can access without set-up anywhere in the world. The system is particularly useful for short-time use, as the user does not need to sign up for local services.

And the hotel has no plans to stop there: "Currently, we have achieved our primary goal to have voice over wireless. Now we are in the process of adding SIP servers to get PDAs connected to our communication network," says Joseph.

If communication is the name of the game, than a modern hotel needs to make sure that it is on top form.

"Implementation of voice over wireless has significantly increased the quality of service. A hotel like the Radisson SAS which wants to offer 100% guest satisfaction should have reliable communication tools. The communication in engineering, house-keeping, the front office and the food and beverage teams are vital and now they are reachable at any time," Joseph concludes.

The Radisson's Technology

Core switch - Cisco Catalyst 4503

Edge switches - Cisco Catalyst C3560

Call manager - Cisco CCM 4.0

IP Phones - Cisco 7941,7970, 7920 & AVAYA wireless phones

Firewall - NPASS

Routers - Cisco 2800

Wireless gateways - Trapeze MX 200

Access points - Trapeze MP372 indoor and MP 620 Out door

Servers - HP DL380, Cisco MCS-7825

Anti spam - F-Secure & Anti virus