



What's Now in High Speed Internet

Nicole Marie Richardson, 6/10/2008

High-speed Internet access (HSIA) in hotels has come a long way. Operators are exploring ways to leverage HSIA, a necessary amenity, to actually drive revenue and boost occupancy. To do that, they are pushing the boundaries to implement the latest technologies. Here's what some trail blazing hoteliers told Hospitality Technology about what's next in HSIA.

1. Wireless

Wireless connectivity at hotels, including in the guest room, in common areas such as lobbies and restaurants, and in conference and meeting spaces, is increasingly important. "No one wants to be stuck at their desk or in their room trying to use their computer," says Alan Baer, Kimpton Hotels' (www.kimptonhotels.com) senior vice president of people and information. Baer explains that with 42 hotels and restaurants, Kimpton employed Eleven Wireless (www.elevenwireless.com) to provide wireless and wired Internet access throughout every hotel, including lobbies, restaurants, meeting rooms and guest rooms. Using ElevenOS, Kimpton can centrally monitor and manage all aspects of both Wi-Fi and wired service at each of its forty-plus locations.

2. VoIP and IPTV

According to Rumi Bhuiyan, assistant general manager of New York-based Wellington Hotel (www.wellingtonhotel.com), a lot of hotels still have a long way to go before they can offer seamless VoIP and IPTV service to their guest. The problem, explains Bhuiyan, is the massive amount of bandwidth needed to do so. This past April, Wellington Hotel increased its bandwidth from 1.5 to 15 megabits and uses switches on each floor of the property to provide even distribution. But not every network can support 15 megabit speeds. For downloading files, fast surfing and supporting VoIP and IPTV, Bhuiyan says 1.5 megabits is "unacceptable." The Wellington called on Roomlinc (www.roomlinc.com) to provide its service. "Guest have to stay connected and we see repeat guests because of our fast and consistent service. Whether they are watching video-on-demand, surfing the web or phone conferencing, the bandwidth makes it possible," says Bhuiyan. "We get at least three to four guests using our Internet-based technology per week and many guests bring their own technology with them."

4 MORE HSIA INNOVATIONS

- **Dedicated bandwidth** for meeting room clients, so that conference guests can access the Internet for live presentations, downloads, and other connectivity needs.
- **Aggregation** of redundant lines into each property.
- **Burstable bandwidth**, allowing guests to choose the maximum bandwidth available that meets their needs, and pay. Some properties are providing up to 100 megabits, if required.
- **802.11n** is the new IEEE proposed standard. It improves upon 802.11 by adding multiple-input/multiple-output (MIMO) features, a signal processing and smart antenna technique for transmitting multiple data streams through multiple antennas. Though the amendment isn't yet final, there are products on the market based on Draft 2.0 and some hotels are already installing them.

VoIP has another benefit, says Jeff Henschel, assistant vice president of technology at Destination Hotels & Resorts (www.destinationhotels.com), which uses Telkonet (www.telkonet.com) to provide wired and wireless connectivity. "VoIP hasn't taken off in the guestroom yet as expected, but for staff it has been great. Rather than using walkie-talkies, staff can communicate with VoIP technology," he says.

3. VPN security

To protect his mega-fast network, Bhuiyan says that VPN is the way to go because it

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provides static IP access and encrypts the data being sent between guests in Web pages, e-mail messages, instant messages, phone conversation, etc. "VPN provides a direct, not shared, connection so it is 100 percent secure," explains Bhuiyan. Therefore, VPN security protects against hotel employees that try to snoop and even a person in another room that may try to hack into your Internet information.

4. Bandwidth-on-demand

We have already mentioned that these super intelligent and multi-tasking networks require lots of bandwidth. Shaine Anderson, assistant general

anager at Best Western Ruby's Inn, insists another answer to the bandwidth problem is bandwidth-on-demand (BoD). BOD is a data communication technique for providing additional capacity on a link as necessary to accommodate bursts in data traffic, such as for a video conference or video-on-demand, for example. The capacity can be increased or decreased as needed.

Anderson notes that after recently taking their HSIA in-house, bandwidth was being eaten up faster than they could handle. He employed FatPipe WARP (www.fatpipeinc.com) technology to significantly

enhance his ability to maintain the integrity of his wide-area network (WAN). "We're in a rural area with limited connectivity but it is important for us to provide consistent HSIA to our guests, who have come to expect it. FatPipe allows for load balancing by sharing Internet connections and we can set the priority. If one connection fails or is being taxed, then another will take over. We can add up to five connections," explains Anderson.

Although the hotel can only offer a 1.5 Mbps T1, it can do so over five separate connections, with the last resort being a satellite connection in case all else fails. FatPipe also offers the FatPipe MPVPN, which provides the added bandwidth coupled with the security of VPN.

5. Customization

"By moving HSIA in-house and moving away from third-party providers, I believe that the Hilton family of hotels has made one of the most innovative moves possible," says Rick McCue, vice president of brand performance and support at Embassy Suites Hotels. The Stay Connected @ The Hilton initiative, their proprietary Internet access solution, provides customers at Hilton properties with the ability to connect to the Internet and

receive a fast, easy and consistent connection whether they are downloading, watching movies or visiting streaming sites like YouTube.com.

"We go to each hotel and customize their equipment, bandwidth and infrastructure for their needs today and in the future. Stay Connected brings service and support in-house as well as remote monitoring and maintenance," says McCue. "Furthermore, I believe we have a unique opportunity because Stay Connected allows for communication across our property management, reservation and revenue systems."

Hilton is currently in the process of rolling out Stay Connected @ The Hilton Family of Hotels. The solution is in about 75 of Hilton's 190 Embassy Suites Hotels nationally.

"Because the system works consistently and reliably, we've seen guest satisfaction scores for HSIA in the participating hotels increase by 21 percent and revenues increase by 29 percent," explains McCue. "So I think it's very possible to boost revenue and drive occupancy by offering consistent HSIA. It has to work and it has to work fast. We've lost corporate accounts and customers because service wasn't there. But we've been able to recapture them with Stay Connected. It's a tremendous selling tool."