

PART OF THE REVENUE AND REPUTATION SERIES FOR HOTELS

Hotel Wi-Fi: More Important Than A Good Breakfast



A whitepaper by Cardonet - making IT happen

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Introduction

Kristine Rose, vice president of brands for Hyatt observed “internet connectivity is no longer an amenity. It has become an integral part of travellers’ daily lives and a basic expectation.”¹ This statement is borne out by the seven in 10 travellers who say free Wi-Fi is more important than a good breakfast, car park facilities, or the hotel’s location.²

And yet, in a global league of hotel Wi-Fi, UK hotels rank a lowly 29th out of 50.³ This is a sticking point for guests who expect to be able to stream high definition video on their mobile devices and be constantly connected to email, internet, social media and more.

In a world where high-speed broadband is now the bar, a poor Wi-Fi signal feels positively archaic and could be reason enough for a hotel guest to post a negative review on social media, check-out early and never return. However, while many guests might view hotel Wi-Fi as a basic utility – they’re often not aware of the different hurdles a hotel has to overcome to roll-out a fast, secure and reliable service throughout the premises. All great technology involves a level of abstraction, meaning the complex engineering is hidden under the surface. If the user only experiences simple intuitive interfaces, the chances are they’ll underestimate the many technological feats that have to happen in the background to provide an excellent Wi-Fi signal.

For instance, they might not appreciate the many wireless connections fighting for space in a crowded urban area and the specialist knowledge that goes into quarantining the hotel Wi-Fi from

other hotspots and channels. They might not consider the robust cybersecurity defences that need to be put in place every time a guest visits a website that’s riddled with malware, to stop the network from grinding to a standstill, while protecting everyone’s data.

Without a doubt, a fast and secure Wi-Fi is a basic customer right – but it’s not always a simple one. This whitepaper sets out how you can achieve the holy grail of “free, fast and uninterrupted” Wi-Fi for your guests.

When you consider the great lengths hotels go to, to source the right furnishings, beauty treatments, breakfast buffet, fitness equipment and so on, their failure to sufficiently secure their systems and protect their guests from identity theft, makes all the other luxuries quickly pale in significance.

This paper will aim to furnish hotels with the information they need to protect themselves from opportunistic individuals, intent on enriching themselves at the expense of others, while causing as much mischief as possible. While the threat is huge, hotels only need to take simple measures to resolve their security flaws, starting with educating their staff.

¹ <http://www.securedgenetworks.com/blog/3-must-follow-rules-for-perfect-hotel-wifi>

² <https://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article90435.html>

³ <http://www.hotelwifitest.com>: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/British-hotels-still-failing-to-provide-adequate-Wi-Fi/>

2. Fast and Uninterrupted Wi-Fi

Having to move around a building to get a better signal is a common bugbear – in hotels as well as anywhere else. Sometimes temporary obstructions cause these blind spots, like onsite construction work and maintenance on the network courier's end. Often, the cause is more chronic; like the building itself. Thick walls can be hard to penetrate and fighting-off interference from other channels in a crowded area requires expertise.

Of course, poor Wi-Fi doesn't just frustrate guests, it also impedes staff and their ability to do their jobs. A productive workforce depends on Wi-Fi day in and day out. The hotel sector is no exception. Some staff might be tethered to a computer terminal, but many will be perambulatory, and being able to transmit and receive data digitally as they move about the hotel is business 101.

Creating stable access points that are centrally managed solves many of these issues. There are a range of technologies available in the marketplace, each with varying functionalities and security credentials.

A trusted business partner will use the best technology for the job, as we did with the Best Western hotel in Stoke. The hotel used to receive around 15 different customer complaints a week about its poor Wi-Fi service. Once Cardonet assessed the problem and installed SonicPoint access points, customer complaints ceased immediately. For instance, SonicPoint N2 wireless access points are renowned for providing high-speed wireless access with enhanced signal quality and reliability from greater range.

Best Western Hotel in Stoke

- Wi-Fi speed improved from 5MB to 100MB
- Entire footprint of the hotel receives a good Wi-Fi signal, including the outdoor balcony areas
- From 15 – 0 weekly customer complaints about the Wi-Fi service
- Achieved all of this with £30K - alternative solutions/IT companies costed at £100K

The key to a strong Wi-Fi signal is to understand what the company's business needs are and the different variables that could impinge upon the Wi-Fi reception. Before embarking upon a refresh, an IT business partner should undertake a comprehensive survey of the hotel's need and produce a heat map to ascertain signal strength in the area.

This upfront homework should consider how many customers might need to connect to the Wi-Fi at any one time. Take a 100-bedroom hotel for example, with two people in each room, and the assumption that everyone travels with at least two devices. Based on these calculations, a hotel would need to support 200 devices. Add 100 devices used by staff and another 50 used in public areas, there are potentially 500 devices running in your hotel at once. That is an enterprise size network: a network that requires thought and financial investment.

3. Free Wi-Fi

Guests don't expect to be charged to use Wi-Fi anymore but how can you provide the fast and uninterrupted service they require, within a sensible budget, so you can afford to offer it for free?

As mentioned earlier, in the case of the Best Western, Stoke, Cardonet achieved savings of £70K for the management company by keeping overhead costs down and through careful selection of the right technology for the job.

Many hotels struggle to get a grip on their Wi-Fi signal by attempting to treat the symptom rather than the cause. This approach is not only costly but ineffective. Before embarking upon an upgrade, it's important to undertake a full audit of the premises and crucially the hotel's wider IT infrastructure. A poor Wi-Fi signal could be a sign of larger problems in a hotel's IT estate which if undiagnosed may lead to further complications and cost down the line.

This is exemplified in our work with the Great Fosters Hotel, Surrey. It needed to upgrade its Wi-Fi, but it was only through asking the right questions and doing the necessary reconnaissance work that we discovered the root cause of the problem lay elsewhere.

With a cautious eye on budget, we stabilised the hotel's servers, addressed the lack of links between its three comms cabinets by creating

a single converged network for the corporate network, public Wi-Fi and corporate internet and deployed a robust-back-up solution. The end-result was a far more reliable, durable network that can support a flawless Wi-Fi service.

In some cases, a crawling Wi-Fi connection points to a localised Wi-Fi issue. In other cases, it's the manifestation of a wider problem. A trusted IT business partner should consider all the different options and be able to service the entire IT infrastructure – if the problem demands it.

Improve Wi-Fi without breaking the bank

- Take a holistic approach: undertake a full audit of the premises and the wider IT infrastructure before investing in a solution
- Reduce installation costs by choosing access points which integrate seamlessly into a hotel's existing infrastructure
- Reduce deployment costs by taking a phased approach. Install a small-scale solution and add to it as needed
- Reduce management costs by ensuring the access points can be simply, centrally managed
- Secure both revenue and reputation by practicing "security by design"

4. Secure Surfing

Your guests may want fast, free and uninterrupted Wi-Fi but they also need secure Wi-Fi. As set out in Cardonet's cyber security whitepaper, the reputational and financial risks of not protecting your – and your guests – data are significant.

Hotels are rich pickings for cyber criminals – given the wide array of disparate systems in any one hotel and the high net wealth of their clientele – and thus need to take the necessary precautions.

This starts with educating your employees and includes, common sense security measures like regularly changing passwords. Many hotel Wi-Fi routers still use the factory-default passwords – which are widely known – making them relatively easy to hack. Throw IoT (Internet of Things) devices and an open Wi-Fi network into the mix, and it's possible to manipulate one device in one room (like a connected kettle), from another device in a different room – to create a health and safety nightmare.

Technical control can be achieved by erecting "Chinese walls" to prevent the exchange of information, between the Wi-Fi and the network. Meaning if someone does open a spurious email attachment and unleashes malware, the hotel's POS for instance, won't be affected.

Not every hotel does this but it's critical to the security of the hotel. This also applies to isolating each connected device on the hotel Wi-Fi, so one guest can't see what another guest is seeing or sending.

Secure Wi-Fi isn't assured. It has to be properly engineered and maintained to stay safe. Read Cardonet's whitepaper "Protecting Hotels from Cyber Attack" for more information on how to protect your hotel from cyber criminals.

5. Cardonet Wi-Fi services

We understand that free, fast and uninterrupted connectivity are your guests' top priorities, which is why we make them ours.

We can take a more holistic look at what's going on with your wider IT infrastructure during an initial review stage, in order to identify areas for improvement and enable you to achieve cost-effective and high performing Wi-Fi in your hotel.

We only work with best-of-breed providers and possess the know-how to design, install, or migrate your Wi-Fi for flawless Wi-Fi that keeps your business and your guests secure.

For further information call [0203 034 2244](tel:02030342244) or email info@cardonet.co.uk

“You can't underestimate the importance of a thorough diagnosis. Sometimes, a poor Wi-Fi connection points to a wider malaise. You can stick some very expensive plasters on the sore but if you don't treat the illness, the sore will only get bigger, deeper, and more painful.”

Sagi D. Saltoun
Cardonet Managing Director

Experts in IT Support and Consultancy for hotels

Cardonet has been providing outsourced IT support, expert IT project delivery and strategic IT services to the hotel and hospitality industry since 1999.

We know that:

- You need an IT partner who can build an IT roadmap that keeps you ahead of the competition and provide director-level business intelligence
- Your team need 24x7x365 proactive support and systems that “just work” so they can concentrate on your guests
- Your guests need super-fast Wi-Fi and technology that works around-the-clock

Cardonet is the only IT team your business will ever need to build the infrastructure, support the systems and advise you on the projects that will maintain your competitive advantage.

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