

Notes From an IT Service Shop

New High-speed Internet Standards

Many hotel chains are updating standards for guest high-speed Internet access. Some of these updated items may require significant changes at the property level.

InterContinental Hotels Group's Holiday Inn brand issued updated specifications that were to be in place by January 31 (other franchisors have issued similar documents). Following are some of the items, along with the potential impact to the hotel:

- Minimum bandwidth of 7.5 mbps.

Hotels still using T1s for Internet connection will have to add either DSL or cable to achieve this bandwidth. Additional equipment may be required.

- Equipment installed in secure areas and access points hidden.

Properties that have access points attached directly to either walls or ceilings will be required to recess or relocate them.

- Guest system supports VPNs and multiple public static IP addresses.

Virtual private networks (VPN) can be supported via software on local machines and additional public static addresses can be obtained from the hotel's Internet service provider.

- The network name must be a combination of brand and hotel name.

This spec, more than likely, will require the hotel to change the SSID in each access point.

- There must to a login required for guests, either a password changed weekly or a property management system interface to verify the guest name/room number.

Upgrading a guest Internet network does not have to be expensive if proper planning and installation are executed.

Some hotels have no login at all, so anyone with a Wi-Fi device can access the Internet. A different router/gateway may be required.

- A splash information page must appear when a guest logs on.

Some routers do not have this capability. A proxy server can be used to display the page and for guest login requirements, as well.

- HSIA must be in all meeting rooms, with at least one wired connection in at least one meeting room.

Hotels should consider wiring all meeting rooms, along with wireless access. Wired connections

work better for video conferencing and Web-based presentations.

- Connection speeds of 2Mbps for wired connections and 1Mbps for each wireless user.

Testing is required to verify these sustained speeds. Some dead zones may require moving access points or adding new and/or more powerful antennas.

- Bandwidth management must be deployed to allow e-mail and webpages priority.

Some routers have this capability, as do most proxy servers.

- A proactive monitoring system of the guest network, as well as minimum repair times by the HSIA provider are required.

Most systems have some type of monitoring feature, but the diagnosis and repair and/or replacement of hardware can be problematic. While remote diagnosis may identify the equipment in question, proper replacement installation and configuration cannot always be accomplished by in-house personnel. The hotel should have a local source of qualified IT service personnel if the HSIA vendor does not have a local presence.

- All equipment must be enterprise grade and industry compliant.

Access points manufac-

tured for home use will need to be replaced with those made for commercial use.

The above is a sampling of some of the requirements for a proper guest Internet network installation. Some hotels that are not in compliance may feel a bit overwhelmed by these and other additional specifications. However, many specifications can be accommodated by simply installing a new router or proxy server.

Cable Internet connections have become much more reliable and affordable. Equipment and connections can be installed for minimal upfront charges and no contract is required in some cases.

Access point placement is an important consideration from both a performance and appearance standpoint. Qualified network personnel have tools to determine where re-positioning access points will enhance performance.

Upgrading a guest Internet network does not have to be expensive if proper planning and installation are executed.

GEOFF GRISWOLD

is a field engineer and general manager of the Omni Group, an IT services company specializing in the hospitality industry. He can be reached at (678) 464-2427 or geoff@atlantaomnigroup.com.