WIRED VS. WIRELESS
A Case for Wired Broadband in Hospitality
Thinking Beyond Internet Access

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At this point, a lot of people in the hospitality industry are trying to figure out how to stay on top of the latest in high-speed Internet service for their guests.

That's a challenge, no question. But I'd like to suggest that there are other, bigger issues that must be addressed at the same time. I believe that during the search for the ideal high-speed Internet solution, the hospitality industry must consider video and entertainment, as well as rapidly developing technologies such as IP telephony.

Sound like a big deal? It's not. In fact you already have the infrastructure in place to do a great job with whatever the future will bring. It's called wires. Simple copper telephone wires are the proven answer for high-speed Internet, and all the entertainment and video you need to bring into – and send out of – your rooms. Even better, those wires will usher your phone center into a new wave of profitability.

So what has to happen to fully leverage your existing infrastructure? Simple. Turn to the latest in DSL, a high-speed connection that uses existing phone lines to deliver overall quality of service that is unmatched by any other solution. Advances in wired broadband are now capable of delivering 26 Mbps service over existing phone lines, ample bandwidth for digital TV service, two-way video conferencing, in addition to high-speed Internet, applications which would bring a wireless network to its knees.

It's an ideal situation. Your infrastructure is mostly installed, so capital costs are lower and more predictable. The equipment is proven and reliable, so the risk is very low. We believe technology should work for you: In the background, humming along without causing a fuss, a silent partner walking steadily with you on the path to greater profits.

For the guest who actually has to use this stuff, the Internet connection is plug-in technology, a simple Ethernet cable. It's something the consumer understands and likes, which makes them happy.

Wired DSL also represents a way to make voice profitable again. Voice over IP is coming to the guestrooms of companies that "get it." You need to decide now if you're going to be a part of the movement, or if you're going to leave the door open for guests to use your broadband service to continue going around your billing system.

Don't make a hasty decision. Make sure you build voice over IP (VoIP) into your model. It will differentiate your service and gain you favorable hotel status with the price-sensitive business traveler. With a fat, reliable broadband pipe dedicated to every room, you are positioned to deploy a business-class VoIP service. Your guests will pay a daily premium for flat-fee voice service that includes unlimited nationwide calling. Since the voice is converted to IP packets in the room and transported to the telephone network over your location broadband connection, you don't have to worry about exhausting ports on your PBX.

Wired is easier to lock down and maintain the integrity of your network. In fact, we're beginning to see business travelers from both government and corporate sectors faced with employee IT policies that prohibit the use of network connections that are not wired.

With wired, budgets are more likely to start reasonable and stay there, because wired is proven enough to not be surprising. You don't want to find out, in the middle of a project, that the solution you picked is not going to provide complete coverage, that it winds up not being so useful to your guests, or that additional work to run new cables will cost you more than originally expected. Wired is a safe budget decision.

But in the end it's really about keeping things simple, and being smart enough to recognize technology that at first blush may appear to be less expensive but in fact may cost more in the long run – while actually offering less in the way of value and services. With WiFi, for example, your patrons will need a wireless card. If they don't have one and they want to use the hotel's wireless service, you will have to provide it for them. It will have to be configured. And then you're going to have to get it back from them at check out.

Be aware: Early adopters of technology are looking for free wireless hotspots, and they'll make themselves at home anywhere they can find one. Be smart about where on your property you want to offer a shared Internet connection.

Make sure you understand the complete business case for a securely wired, very high-speed guestroom connection before surrendering your existing investment in your wires. Count your wires in for the long haul. They have the potential to enhance your rooms with a new level of profitable services.

Unmatched quality of service that allows you, and your guests, to sleep soundly at night.

WIRED VS. WIRELESS
The Biggest Reason for Wireless Is Convenience

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As dial-up connections made way for DSL and pay phones made way for cellular, so too will ADSL for WiFi. Rapid advancements in technology have brought hoteliers to a crossroads. Both ADSL and wireless connectivity are viable solutions. But how will you move your hotel forward efficiently and cost effectively and remain in line with the demands of your guests? Perhaps the single biggest reason for wireless is convenience.

Wireless provides for a simple, secure connection to the Internet from anywhere in the covered area. Through proper engineering and planning, this same ease-of-use can be experienced by your guests anywhere on the property. No more being handcuffed to desk-only work spaces. Meetings are facilitated in restaurants, poolside or in uniquely configured conference spaces.

Installing the right equipment for the job is key. Certified systems, engineered and installed by qualified RF engineers, avoid the pitfalls experienced through improper installation practices.

A properly engineered and equipped wireless system supports enterprise-class virtual LANS (VLANs). The industry standard Cisco system can manage up to 16 VLANs, allowing customers to differentiate LAN policies and services such as security and quality of service. This includes such applications as additional encryption for conference users, separate networks for hotel back-office networks, restaurant POS applications, secure curbside check in and others.

The only constant in the hospitality industry is change. Renovating? Adding a wing or conference space? Engineering for your improvements is a simple feat without the hassles of relocating guest access areas. There is no rewiring of guestrooms to accommodate wired requirements, nor is there the need to add additional in-room equipment for guests' connections.

With proper server security measures in place, such as firewall, authentication, PMS verification and encryption, as well as full VPN compatibility, security in a wireless environment meets or exceeds even the toughest client requirements. By utilizing 128-bit WEP encryption protocols and matching the guest laptop access devices with this same protocol, even the un-savvy user is guaranteed secure experience. Through the use of VLANs, every user is secure from the prying eyes of the unsavory character in the next room. And by installing a server system that is built with the business traveler in mind, all popular virtual private network software works effortlessly.

A properly engineered and equipped wireless solution will allow the service provider to monitor system performance and integrity all the way to the access point, and allow for remote configuration and maintenance, dramatically reducing site support costs. DSL solutions by their very nature have many more potential points of failure (a modem in every room) and limited remote monitoring capability. By continuously monitoring and testing each access point, server, switch and router in a wireless environment, costly down time is avoided, and guest satisfaction is ensured. DSL runs over existing phone lines putting a wired solution at the mercy of a phone system upgrade or repair–even a complete replacement. Wireless networks, while employing some wires, operate as a completely separate system, fully contained from interference with existing hotel systems.

Companies like PriceWaterhouse Coopers, Disney, GM and Intel are fully supporting and deploying WiFi networks because of their ease of implementation, ease of adding additional users, infrastructure cost containment, expandability and portability. Road warriors are seeing wireless networks in public spaces as an easy way to stay in touch.

The industry's adoption of the 802.11 protocols nationwide is testament to its viability in the market, and the demand impressed by users.

Adoption of internal WiFi cards is growing at an unprecedented pace. And for those users who do not have a card, software-free wireless Ethernet adapters are a simple and secure solution to get guests connected quickly and easily.

Wireless networks on average cost approximately 20 percent to 30 percent less than ADSL systems to fully deploy and still cover the entire building not just the 4 foot radius from the modem on the desk.

Predicting the future isn't easy. And technology's rapid changes have made the guessing game even more difficult. But follow the trends and trendsetters. An overwhelming number of hotels that have installed 100 percent wireless solutions have found the solution a positive experience. Engineered to fit their properties, they now have a scalable and secure solution. And the ease-of-use through plug-and-play technology has made for a positive experience for hotel guests.

Why wireless? The bigger question is, why not.

Both ADSL and wireless connectivity are viable solutions. But how will you move your hotel forward efficiently and cost effectively and remain in line with the demands of your guests?